

THE TIBETAN BOOK of THE DEAD

Awakening Upon Dying

Introduction by
CHÖGYAL NAMKHAJ NORBU

Translated from the Tibetan and annotated by
ELIO GUARISCO

Rendered into English and edited by
NANCY SIMMONS



THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD

“Chögyal Namkhai Norbu’s intention, specified in his ‘Note to the Translation’ in a 1983 Italian edition, has been followed in the present volume: ‘Rather than rendering the text from a strictly academic perspective, I have chosen an approach better suited to a Western lay public that remains, however, true to the original.’ ”

—Nancy Simmons, English editor, translator, and founding member of the International Dzogchen Community established by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

“The subtitle *Awakening Upon Dying* epitomizes the book’s basic message that death is not the end, but a gate to spiritual freedom. Though *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* has been translated a few times in the past, this welcome new edition is supplemented by a brilliant and profound introduction by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu; traditional invocations at the time of death; and three appendices about the signs of dying, practical assistance at that time, and the symbolism of the deities appearing after death. Thus, this very practical book represents a hands-on and comprehensive guide through the whole process of dying and the afterlife.”

—Karl Brunnhoelzl,
author of *The Center of the Sunlit Sky* and *The Heart Attack Sutra*

THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD

Awakening Upon Dying

PADMASAMBHAVA
and
KARMA LINGPA

Introduction by
CHÖGYAL NAMKHA NORBU

Translated from the Tibetan and annotated by
Elio Guarisco

Rendered into English and edited by
Nancy Simmons



North Atlantic Books
Berkeley, California



Shang Shung Publications
Arcidosso, Italy

Copyright © 2013 by Shang Shung Publications. All rights reserved. No portion of this book, except for brief review, may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—with the written permission of the publisher. For information contact North Atlantic Books.

Published by
North Atlantic Books
P.O. Box 12327
Berkeley, California 94712
www.northatlanticbooks.com

and

Shang Shung Publications
Località Merigar
58031 Arcidosso (GR), Italy
www.shangshungpublications.org

Cover illustration: a painting from the Bardo series, 2006, by the Venerable Eighth Dugu
Choegyal Rinpoche, courtesy of the Alessandra Bonomo Gallery, Rome;
photographed by Antonello Idini
Color plate illustrations courtesy of Rubin Museum of Art; artists unknown
Cover and interior design by Daniel Zegunis

The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Awakening Upon Dying is sponsored by the Society for the Study of Native Arts and Sciences, a nonprofit educational corporation whose goals are to develop an educational and cross-cultural perspective linking various scientific, social, and artistic fields; to nurture a holistic view of arts, sciences, humanities, and healing; and to publish and distribute literature on the relationship of mind, body, and nature.

North Atlantic Books' publications are available through most bookstores. For further information, visit our website at www.northatlanticbooks.com or call 800-733-3000.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Karma-glin-pa, 14th cent.
[Bar do thos grol. English]
The Tibetan book of the dead: awakening upon dying / composed by Padmasambhava; revealed by Tertön Karma Lingpa; introductory commentary by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu; translated from the Tibetan and annotated by Elio Guarisco; edited by Nancy Simmons. pages cm
Summary: "This text offers a new translation of the ancient Buddhist text designed to facilitate the inner liberation of the dead or dying person at the

moment of death."—Provided by publisher.

Includes bibliographical references.

eISBN: 978-1-58394-573-5

1. Intermediate state—Buddhism—Early works to 1800. 2. Death—Religious aspects—Buddhism—Early works to 1800. 3. Spiritual life—Buddhism—Early works to 1800. I. Padma Sambhava, ca. 717-ca. 762. II. Namkhai Norbu, 1938- III. Guarisco, Elio, 1954- IV. Title.

BQ4490.K3713 2013

294.3'423—dc23

2012032792

IPC - 73IEN12 - Approved by the International Publications Committee of the Dzogchen Community founded by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

v3.1

Contents

Cover

Title Page

Copyright

Color Plates and Illustrations

Preface

Propaedeutic Note

Introduction by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

THE GREAT LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING

Prologue

Premise

Instructions

Introduction to the Clear Light in the Intermediate State of the Moment of Death

Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base

Introduction to the Clear Light of the Path

Introduction to Recognizing the Intermediate State of Reality

The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality

The Vision of the Wrathful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality

Conclusion of the Introduction to the Intermediate State of the Moment of Death and the Intermediate State of Reality

Introduction to the Intermediate State of Rebirth

Introduction to the Mental Body

Obstructing Womb Entrances

Choosing a Womb Entrance

Conclusion

Invocations

About These Invocations

*The Invocation That Calls to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help:
Natural Liberation from Fear*
*The Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the
Intermediate States*
The Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States

The Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States

About These Verses

The Verses

Epilogue

Appendix A: Recognizing the Signs of Encroaching Death

Appendix B: Further Ways to Assist the Dying and the Dead

Appendix C: The Symbolism of the Mandala of the Peaceful and
Wrathful Deities

The Forty-Two Peaceful Deities

The Awareness Holders

The Fifty-Eight Wrathful Deities

Notes

Bibliography

About the Authors and Contributors

Color Plates

Plate 1: Padmasambhava

Plate 2: One hundred peaceful and wrathful deities

Plate 3: Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri

Plate 4: Vairocana with Ākāśadhātviśvari

Plate 5: Akṣobhya with Buddhalocanā and attendant deities

Plate 6: Ratnasambhava with Māmakī and attendant deities

Plate 7: Amitābha with Pāṇḍaravāsinī and attendant deities

Plate 8: Amoghasiddhi with Samayatārā and attendant deities

Plate 9: Four male gatekeepers with their consorts

Plate 10: Six Buddhas

Plate 11: Five awareness holders with their consorts

Plate 12: Six herukas

Plate 13: Eight mātarah

Plate 14: Eight piśāci

Plate 15: Four female gatekeepers

Plate 16: Twenty-eight iśvari

Illustrations

ill fm3.1 *Mandala of Samantabhadra with mantras that liberate through hearing*

ill fm3.2 *Effigy of the deceased used in funeral rites*

ill app2.1 *The wheel of transmigration*

ill app2.2 *Avalokiteśvara*

Preface

THE SUBJECT OF this book is the continuity of consciousness and the consequent possibility of spiritual liberation during the process of dying and after death as understood in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, an explanation long famed in Europe and North America as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Contained in the present volume are two texts from a large collection of teachings pertaining to that subject known in Tibetan as the Great Liberation through Hearing. The cycle of the Great Liberation through Hearing, in turn, is itself included in a still more extensive body of literature titled the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State*.¹ Translated from the Tibetan, these two core texts as parts of the cycle of the Great Liberation through Hearing are titled An Elucidation of the Intermediate State of Reality, Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States and An Introduction to the Intermediate State of Rebirth, Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States. They contain instructions designed to facilitate the inner liberation of the dying or dead person by helping him or her recognize and make use of the experiences that occur during three distinct phases: at the moment of death; during the bewildering and prolonged postmortem stages; and on the treacherous journey into a new existence.

This book also includes three invocations that are traditionally read to the dying person, followed by the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States, which present the essential meaning of these six states, namely, living, dreaming, meditation, the moment of death, reality, and rebirth. Three appendixes that list signs of encroaching death, further ways to assist the dying, and the symbolism of the deities that appear in the intermediate state of reality conclude what can justly be considered a manual for spiritual realization at the moment of death and during the

afterlife stages, known as the *bardo* or intermediate state.

These translations of the core texts, the invocations, and the root verses of the six intermediate states are a revisiting of those contained in an Italian edition titled *Il Libro Tibetano dei Morti*,² a translation made under the supervision of professor Chögyal Namkhai Norbu by a group of his students during a Tibetan language and literature course that he taught at the L'Orientale of the University of Naples in the 1979–1980 academic year. However, in some respects the present book can be considered a new translation of the original Tibetan texts, since Tibetan editions that have surfaced since 1980 have shed light on previously ambiguous passages, and because improvements in the interpretation of Tibetan texts in recent translations have been taken into consideration.

A profound commentary by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu precedes and clarifies the texts from the Dzogchen point of view. In its original form, compiled by his students from oral teachings that he gave at a meditation retreat at Volpago, Italy, in 1980, it was included in the Italian edition cited above. In addition, material from several of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's more recent written works and oral teachings was added, particularly from an essay on the four intermediate after-death states in *Birth, Life and Death*.³ Extracts from transcripts of meditation retreats that he gave at Merigar in Arcidosso, Italy, in January 1992 and August 1998, as well as at other times, also enrich the book.

Since the fourteenth century, when knowledge contained in these instructions on liberation in the intermediate states first came to light, the content of the original texts gained vast popularity throughout Tibet and in the surrounding Himalayan regions. The first English version of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States was published in 1927,⁴ translated by Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup (1868–1922), then headmaster of the Sikkimese Maharaja's Boys' school near Gangtok, at the request of Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz (1878–1965), an American-born and Oxford-educated anthropologist who also assisted in the process of translation. Evans-Wentz had been given a woodblock print of these texts by Major W. L. Campbell, purchased by the latter on a visit to Gyantse in western Tibet. This pioneering translation was followed over the years by, among others, the free-flowing and evocative version of

Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa;⁵ *Il Libro Tibetano dei Morti*, cited above; professor Robert Thurman's *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Book of Natural Liberation through Understanding in the Between*,⁶ a translation that presents a psychological and symbolic interpretation of the work; and, most recently, an exhaustive and acclaimed translation by Gyurme Dorje.⁷

The Tibetan Book of the Dead gained unprecedented popularity in the West in the 1960s and early 1970s through spurring and satisfying the desire for unconventional knowledge of the younger generations of that period. A considerable contribution to the dissemination of Tibetan Buddhism in the West, the book can assuredly be counted among the world's great spiritual classics. Although its core knowledge first appeared in the fourteenth century, modern scholars believe that the book as it reaches us today is a fluid compendium of related texts from different historical periods. The collection underwent various modifications and liturgical adaptations during the centuries that followed, and its present form derives from its first single-volume compilation in the seventeenth century by *rigdzin* Nyima Tragpa (1647–1710), a Nyingma master from whose work all extant editions seem to stem. The common procedure in Tibet of adding various explanatory and liturgical texts as corollaries to a particular spiritual teaching, over the course of centuries, with the intent of facilitating its understanding and application, makes this reading of the volume's history credible.

Tradition attributes the authorship of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States to the eighth-century Buddhist master Padmasambhava⁸ of Odḍiyāna,⁹ the famed mystic land, purported source of many Buddhist tantras. Revered by Tibetans as Guru Rinpoche, the Precious Guru, Padmasambhava is traditionally celebrated throughout Tibet and other Himalayan regions for his role in the propagation of tantric Buddhism in those lands, and he was particularly important as one of the supreme masters who introduced the Dzogchen (Great Perfection) teachings in Tibet. Although the authorship of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States is attributed to Padmasambhava, it should be remembered that he did not create this teaching. Preexistent Buddhist sutra doctrines, tantric practices, and especially ancient Dzogchen tantras¹⁰

belonging to the *upadeśa* series, such as the Great Secret Union of the Sun and Moon and the All-penetrating Sound,¹¹ undoubtedly formed the basis for the teachings presented in this text by Padmasambhava. These tantras contain lengthy and precise descriptions of the death process and of after-death experiences that are closely related to the mode of guidance of the deceased found in the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States.

According to historical records, Padmasambhava, whose thaumaturgical powers were well-known in India, was invited to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen¹² at the suggestion of the Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita in order to subdue the forces opposing the spread of Buddhism there. He accepted the invitation and taught extensively while in the Land of Snow, in particular to a group of twenty-four principal disciples and to the king and his consort. He also benefited generations to come in a way unknown until then, which must have been considered strange at the time: he hid, as a protection from corruption and misuse, a vast array of spiritual doctrines, concealed in different locations throughout Tibet and, remarkably, in the pure awareness of the minds of his chief disciples. He prophesied that future incarnations of these disciples would discover, at an auspicious time, these hidden spiritual teachings or *termas*. Those who revealed these treasures at a later time came to be known as hidden-treasure revealers, or *tertöns*. Among the most famous of these was a young fourteenth-century mystic known as Karma Lingpa,¹³ whose exact dates of birth and death are unknown. The meditative practices that form the heart of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States teaching are considered to have been revealed by this tertön in his youth.

Concerning the prophecy about Karma Lingpa as a hidden-treasure revealer, Gyarawa's text A Garland of Jewels tells us that sometime in the eighth century, King Trisong Detsen, the translator Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen,¹⁴ and other individuals of the royal court offered Padmasambhava a gold and turquoise *mandala* as a symbolic representation of the universe and entreated him for a teaching that would liberate them effortlessly in their present lifetimes. In response, the master, warning of the dark times that awaited Tibet, transmitted to them the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation*

through Recognition of the Primordial State, the essence of all Dzogchen teachings, and then concealed it on Gampodar mountain in the Dagpo region. He prophesied that an emanation of Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen named Karma Lingpa would discover this terma or hidden treasure in the future.

Karma Lingpa's father, the visionary Nyida Sangye, was himself a tertön who had retrieved from Black Mañḍala Lake in Dagpo a powerful method of transference of consciousness to the pure land of Amitābha. Relatively little is known about him, although the Secret Records of the Fifth Dalai Lama reveal that he was a student of the second Zhamarpa, Khacho Wangpo,¹⁵ who in the hierarchy of the Karma Kagyü school was second only to its head, the Karmapa. This association with the Kagyüpa¹⁶ may explain why the term *karma* was affixed to his son's name, generally true of those who follow the Kagyü tradition or who are ordained as novices or monks in that school. In any case, as Dagpo was the birthplace of Gampopa,¹⁷ the founder of the Kagyü school, the whole area became a stronghold of that tradition, and whoever resided there adhered to the Kagyü school as a matter of course. Nyida Sangye lived to an advanced old age, surviving his eldest son, Karma Lingpa, by many years.

The eldest son of Nyida Sangye, Karma Lingpa, the emanation of Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen, was born in a town called Khyerdrup in eastern Dagpo. The prophecy of Padmasambhava and auspicious circumstances converged when Karma Lingpa reached age fifteen, and probably assisted by his father, he discovered a series of terma treasures, the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State*, on Mount Gampodar,¹⁸ located northeast of the Dalha Gampo monastery. As is traditional with such discoveries, Karma Lingpa was meant to keep these teachings secret until the prescribed time for their disclosure. This restriction exists so that the tertön has a certain period to become familiar with the revelation, practice its contents, and realize its fruits. It is said, however, that Karma Lingpa disclosed his revelation to fourteen of his disciples before the just amount of time had elapsed, although he strictly forbade its diffusion.

Karma Lingpa's destiny was not a fortunate one. A tertön relies on the rapport with a suitable consort so that the bliss and emptiness he experiences in sexual union reawaken in his mind

the crucial indications related to the terma. Since uniting with the predicted auspicious consort was impossible, Karma Lingpa chose another woman, a choice that for unknown reasons caused widespread criticism among the local townspeople. This, along with the fact that Karma Lingpa had allowed a section of the undeciphered yellow scroll¹⁹ of his terma to be seen prematurely, were said to have been the causes that led to his untimely death. According to another account, Karma Lingpa was poisoned by a consort and one of his attendants. Before dying he proffered various prophecies in a trancelike state and uttered striking words about his extraordinary level of realization. On the verge of death, he transmitted the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State* to his son, Nyida Chöje. After his death, Karma Lingpa's father, Nyida Sangye, and son, Nyida Chöje, became the lineage holders of his terma and its main propagators. However, none of the later descendants of Karma Lingpa appear to have played an important role in the teaching's lineage, and its transmission developed outside his family.

Nyida Chöje, perhaps the only son of Karma Lingpa, was reputed to have been a highly gifted child, mastering at an early age various fields of knowledge and in particular the Dzogchen teaching. By the time he was seventeen years old, he was already imparting spiritual instructions and was expert in conducting elaborate rituals. When Nyida Chöje left his home and traveled east to Longpo,²⁰ he encountered a Nyingma lama, Nyida Öser (1409 or 1421–?), an outstanding meditator and scholar. Nyida Chöje recognized in him the spiritual teacher who had appeared to him in prophetic dreams and became convinced that he was the destined third holder of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* revelation of his father. Thus he bestowed upon him the entire transmission with the injunction to practice it for six years before revealing it to others.

The particulars of the life of Nyida Öser differ in various sources, although all agree that he was the son of a doctor. His strong spiritual propensity beginning in childhood led him to adopt the solitary life of a hermit. Later he studied with various masters and became the author of many treatises, unfortunately no longer extant, with the exception of some texts contained in the anthologies of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*. Nyida Öser

transmitted the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, including the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, to a monk from Kongpo named Gyarawa Chökyi Gyatso,²¹ who became the fourth in the lineage of transmission of this doctrine. He was born in 1430 in lower Kongpo in the Gyara family. At age five, following the untimely death of his parents, he was placed in the care of his uncle, Lama Chödrup, the lama of a small monastery called Tashi Menmo, probably affiliated with the Nyingma school. As he grew up, Gyarawa exhibited a special gift in spiritual matters and studied an extensive range of subjects, including the Kālacakra tantra and Dzogchen with teachers of various traditions. At age twenty-one, following his uncle's death, Gyarawa became abbot of this monastery. In the course of time he was to play a decisive role in the wide dissemination of the doctrine of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* in central, western, eastern, and southern Tibet.

Besides his root guru, Nyida Öser, Gyarawa had other important teachers, including the sixth Karmapa, Thongwa Donden (1416–1453), the famous treasure-finder Ratna Lingpa,²² and the second Gyalwang Drugchen, Kunga Paljor.²³ Gyarawa wrote commentaries and instruction manuals for the performance of rituals belonging to the cycle of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* as well as a history of its early transmission titled *A Garland of Jewels: A Short History of the Lineage*. Credited with the authorship of at least twenty-five texts that appear in various recensions of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, he contributed greatly to the codification of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* body of teachings. According to Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye's biographical accounts of the lives of the major tertöns, titled *A Necklace of Precious Lapis Lazuli*,²⁴ Gyarawa opened the door for the propagation of this teaching in northern Tibet among the Nyingmapas and also among the followers of the Kagyü school. The Gyarawa lineage was also transmitted to various masters of the Nyingma institutions of Kathog,²⁵ Palyul,²⁶ and Dzogchen²⁷ monasteries, as well as to masters of other monasteries and schools, a dissemination instrumental in the preservation of the Karma Lingpa termas. He also played an important role in the transmission of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, a teaching that, although closely affiliated with the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on*

Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State, represents, according to some, a distinct tradition.²⁸ Its transmission was preserved in its earlier history by the monastic hierarchies of Dagpo Tsele Gong O^g²⁹ and Kongpo Thangdrog Ösal Tse,³⁰ and thereafter by the successive incarnations of Padma Lingpa³¹ at Lhalung Lhungrub³² monastery in southern Tibet.

Transmitted through the lineages of various masters, the termas of Karma Lingpa were distinguished by their ample diffusion despite the brief life of their discoverer and became established practices throughout Tibet, Bhutan, and other Himalayan regions, unlike any other terma teaching of that time.³³ In the seventeenth century, the lineage extended to include Terdag Lingpa³⁴ and a charismatic and controversial tertön from eastern Tibet, rigdzin Nyima Tragpa,³⁵ who assumed a prominent role in the transmission of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* teaching of Karma Lingpa. Born in Nangchen³⁶ with a family lineage of accomplished masters, Nyima Tragpa matured into an extraordinary visionary and a powerful exorcist. His link with Karma Lingpa stemmed from the commonly held conviction that he was an incarnation of the translator Chogro Lu'i Gyaltsen as well as of Karma Lingpa's consort. His previous incarnation was said to have been a Drigung Kagyü³⁷ lama named Pholungpa Karma Samdrup (1625–1697), a practitioner of the wrathful deity Trogma Nagmo.³⁸ His father and grandfather belonged to the Drugpa Kagyü school,³⁹ and thus Nyima Tragpa was sent to study in a Drugpa Kagyü monastery.

Nevertheless, as is often the case with treasure finders, at an early age Nyima Tragpa had visions of Padmasambhava and developed an interest in the Nyingma school. As he wished to study with a Nyingma master, he was sent to Dzogchen Padma Rigdzin (1625–1697), who became his main teacher. He also became the student of Karma Chagme and the great tertön Düdul Dorje (1615–1672), among others. Düdul Dorje, in particular, confirmed that the boy was the incarnation of Pholungpa, and having taken a great liking to him, designated him the holder of his own Vajrakilaya⁴⁰ treasure teaching. In 1668 he accompanied his root teacher, Padma Rigdzin, on a pilgrimage to Tsari,⁴¹ and when his master undertook a strict three-year retreat, Nyima Tragpa joined him, marking the beginning of his life as a yogin.

Shortly thereafter, he also began to teach, and his exceptional charisma inspired patrons to shower him with adulation and generous offerings. This trend continued and was perhaps the cause of problems he encountered later in life.

His lively mind led him to journey throughout the various regions of Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, India, and western China, actively engaging with spiritual leaders, rulers, and local people wherever he went. In Lhasa, for example, he became the teacher of Desi Sangye Gyatso⁴² and of Tsangyang Gyatso (1683–1706 or 1746), the young Sixth Dalai Lama. In eastern Tibet, Nyima Tragpa enjoyed the patronage of the royal families of Lingtshang, Lhari, and most notably, the kings of Derge.⁴³ He studied with numerous teachers during his travels, receiving transmissions of the principal terma teachings of earlier masters, including Karma Lingpa's *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, with which he had a special connection.

Nyima Tragpa was the revealer of various terma cycles, and in particular of three cycles that appeared to him during a three-year period of strict retreat beginning in 1687 at the Black Cave of Chagru. He established these teachings as central practices in various monasteries, including Tagmo Gang, his own seat. However, his termas were not placed in the *Precious Treasury of Termas*,⁴⁴ the famed and monumental collection of terma teachings compiled by the great Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye. This exclusion was probably linked to the disfavor Nyima Tragpa incurred in the Kagyü school as the result of an incident involving certain officials and the tertön Yonge Mingyur Dorje (1628 or 1641–1708), who was closely related to the Kamtsang or Karma Kagyü, a principal Kagyü subschool guided by the Gyalwang Karmapa. Requesting an encounter with Nyima Tragpa, Yonge Mingyur Dorje met with refusal and disrespectful treatment.⁴⁵ Involved in the intricacies of this incident might have been the jealousy manifested by the Kagyüs, provoked by the lavish support accorded Nyima Tragpa by the king of Derge. Whatever the case, Nyima Tragpa was clearly an influential figure in seventeenth-century Tibet and a powerful propagator not only of his own transmissions and teachings, among which was the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* of Karma Lingpa, but also of those of his masters. A further indication of his close connection with Karma Lingpa's zhitro teachings came when the tertön Ngari

Padma Garwang Tsal, while giving him various Dzogchen transmissions, prophesied that Nyima Tragpa would be a famed holder of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* cycle, and that with it he would benefit many beings.

In 1684, inspired by a vision he had while traveling in Nepal, Nyima Tragpa went to Mindroling monastery⁴⁶ to meet Terdag Lingpa, who, delighted with the encounter, appointed him as the holder of his own terma, Yamāntaka, Destroyer of Arrogant Spirits. Nyima Tragpa practiced the Yamāntaka teaching in secret and attained mastery of it, and he subsequently became known as a powerful exorcist and a lama gifted with miraculous powers.

Three different lineages of Karma Lingpa's *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* converged in Terdag Lingpa, two from Gyarawa and the third from lama Gonpo Dorje of Kongo, who had been a student of Karma Lingpa's son, Nyida Chöje. Padma Gyurme Gyatso (1686–1718), the second son of Terdag Lingpa, transmitted the various lineages of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* of Mindroling to Nyima Tragpa's son, Galse Orgyan Tenzin.⁴⁷

Eventually, Karma Lingpa's teachings passed from Mindroling to Dzogchen monastery. Orgyan Tenzin taught them to Padma Thegchog Tenpe Gyaltsen (1712–1771), the first incarnation of his father and the third abbot of Tagmo Gang monastery. Padma Thegchog transmitted the termas to the third Dzogchen Rinpoche, Ngedon Tendzin Zangpo (1759–1792) of Dzogchen monastery, who preserved the texts of the Great Liberation through Hearing in xylographic form in the mid-eighteenth century, perhaps for the first time. This edition presented Nyima Tragpa's textual arrangement of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States found today in most editions of the text⁴⁸ (as exemplified in the bibliography). This xylographic edition was not actually compiled at Dzogchen monastery, however. When the first Dzogchen Rinpoche, Padma Rigzin, founded Rudam monastery, later widely known as Dzogchen monastery, he asked Nyima Tragpa to become its first abbot. Nyima Tragpa declined this responsibility, citing an injunction in his own termas that exhorted him to travel constantly. Nevertheless, Dzogchen monastery became the seat of Nyima Tragpa's successive incarnations.

Propaedeutic Note

THIS TRANSLATION HAS followed Chögyal Namkhai Norbu's intent, specified in his "Note on the Translation" in the 1983 Italian edition: "Rather than rendering the text from a strictly academic perspective, I have chosen an approach better suited to the Western lay public that remains, however, true to the original."

Some will be disposed to use this book according to its contemplated purpose, that is, as a map for the benefit of those willing to make use of it for the voyage we must all take; others will want to clarify their understanding of how to apply its deep knowledge in daily life. In the hope of facilitating easier comprehension of the structure of this work, I have employed graphic means to differentiate the identities of the voices speaking within the text.

In this book, the voice of the teacher, speaking in three different modes, instructs the would-be assistant of the dying and the dead in how to proceed.

In the first mode, addressing the prospective giver of guidance, the teacher explains the various external factors and conditions that need to be fulfilled: what sort of person can best perform this guidance, the offerings to be made, the invocations to be chanted, and so forth. The text is printed in roman typeface with normal margins.

In the second mode, which makes up the bulk of the text, the voice of the teacher transmits the advice that the assistant should repeat aloud to the dying or dead person, beginning always with "O, Child of Enlightened Nature." This information makes clear the various postmortem processes he or she is undergoing, such as the dissolution of the elements of the body, the successive states of consciousness in the intermediate states of the bardo, the actual situation and its possibilities and risks, the spiritual topography perceived as external, and how to think and act in order to reach realization. The text is printed in roman typeface

and indented.

In the third mode, the teacher for the benefit of the assistant speaks as the moribund or dead person who is abiding in an intermediate state or bardo, invoking the compassionate aid of the buddhas with aspirational prayers. In assuming this role, the teacher demonstrates the attitude that the deceased, having been taught by the assistant, needs to be adopt to adopt by the assistant in the postmortem journey from the cycle of existence to the state of liberation. The text is printed in italic and indented.

In each case, it is the voice of the teacher who is instructing: in his or her own voice, then as the spiritual assistant advising the dead person, and lastly as the deceased. Understanding this structure, the reader can more easily follow the teaching as it unfolds.

Nancy Simmons

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Shang Shung Institute goes our unconditional gratitude for the encouragement and support of the Ka-Ter translation project for this book and other works related to the Dzogchen teaching. Adriano Clemente receives our thanks for his unstinting sharing of his knowledge of problematic terms and obscure meanings in Tibetan texts. Our thankful recognition goes also to Susan Schwarz, who focused her admirable precision on the charts presented in Appendix C and on a plethora of details.

We thank all those who, before us, have translated Karma Lingpa's Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States and whose scholarly endeavors with the words and meanings of this profound text have created a helpful background for the present translation.

We wish to express gratitude to the venerable eighth Dugu Choegyal Rinpoche, great Mahāmudrā master and artist, for the whole-hearted permission granted to us to reproduce his painting on the cover of the book. This image belongs to Rinpoche's illuminated series of depictions of the bardo and is a truly striking view of awakening upon dying.

We pay deep homage to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, whose oral teaching is a sun that illuminates the true meaning of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, revealing it as the primordial condition of each one of us. His constant and untiring message reminds and encourages us to search for the authentic value of life and prepares us for the critical time of death. He introduces us to the real nature of mind, opening the door so that we can discover the enlightenment already present in each of us, and offers us the precious knowledge that enables us to choose a better future through the methods he so clearly explains.

Elio Guarisco and Nancy Simmons

Introduction

THE GREAT LIBERATION through Hearing in the Intermediate States, well known in the West as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, is part of a large body of literature titled in Tibetan the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State*. Its authorship is attributed to Padmasambhava, an important Indian master of the eighth century.¹ While in Tibet, Padmasambhava concealed the texts of this teaching at Mount Gampodar near the Yangtze River, where they remained as a terma or hidden treasure until the fourteenth century, when Karma Lingpa, a Tibetan youth of fifteen, brought them to light.

THE HIDDEN TREASURES

The hidden-treasure or terma tradition is a widespread phenomenon in Tibet, both in the Buddhist and in the pre-Buddhist Bönpo tradition. Hidden treasures are doctrines, texts, and sacred objects concealed by spiritual teachers in order to preserve them during future periods of plundering, devastation, religious corruption, and so on that these masters foresaw lay ahead. Subsequently, sometimes hundreds of years later at a propitious time, the terma would be discovered by a spiritually gifted individual known as a finder of hidden treasures or tertön, following indications revealed to that person in dreams, visions, or in normal waking life.

Two main kinds of hidden treasure exist: those hidden in the earth and those hidden in the mind. Earth treasures can be texts of spiritual teaching or sacred objects such as small statues, ritual instruments, relics, stones, or precious metals, and so on. Earth treasures are usually concealed underground or in rocks, caves, temple pillars, and similar places. Mind treasures, on the other hand, are spiritual teachings and instructions that emerge as

natural visions from the essence of the treasure finder's mind. These teachings are then committed to writing by the tertön himself or by a scribe, then practiced by the discoverer, and at the prescribed time, taught to others.

My academic experience in the West alerted me to the considerable mistrust with which termas are regarded by scholars. Although I recognize that forgeries certainly exist among the hidden treasures, the incidents I witnessed and the stories I heard as a youth in Tibet of the discoveries of authentic earth and mind termas inspired me with trust in these phenomena. I recount below a few examples of these remarkable findings to familiarize the reader with the hidden-treasure tradition of which so little is known in the West.

In the summer of 1952 I stayed some time with my uncle, Khyentse Chökyi Wangchug,² a highly advanced spiritual practitioner, at his retreat place in Lhalung in eastern Tibet. In that period he was imparting a Dzogchen teaching to some twenty of his disciples. One day he called me to his room and recounted a dream in which he had received indications about a hidden treasure. Some weeks later, he told me that he had had another such dream, this time clearer, in which he received precise instructions for the discovery of a terma related to Vajrapāṇi.³ In the dream, he saw a cave; at the cave's entrance a shadow cast by the sun striking the rocks was clearly visible in the shape of the Tibetan character ཨ (Ah). From his dream, my uncle recognized the location of the cave to be an area near a mountain that we both knew. I did my best to convince him to search for that place and to make the discovery in public, as specified in the instructions he had received, although he agreed to do so only after my long and insistent urging.

One day we set off for the place indicated in his dream, and arriving in the vicinity of the mountain, we searched the surroundings for a whole day until we succeeded in finding the cave. My uncle noted that the cave was truly identical to the one he had seen in his dream, and we felt great joy. As word of the forthcoming revelation of a terma spread, a crowd of people gathered from different parts of the region to assist at the event and, as is customary in Tibet on such occasions, to celebrate the event with songs, dances, and games. They pitched their tents and took part in propitiatory rituals to favor the discovery of the

terma and eliminate the possibility of obstacles.

At dawn on the tenth day of the lunar month (July 1951), an auspicious day for Tibetans, after a long invocation my uncle remained in lengthy meditation. Then he took a pickax and hurled it with all his strength at the rock above the mouth of the cave. The pickax struck a point at a considerable height, and as that spot could not be reached unaided, local people hurriedly readied a wooden ladder. Mounting it, a monk from a nearby monastery climbed to the mark made by the pickax, where my uncle told him to begin digging. As soon as he started, he called down to say that the rock's surface was friable. After a short while, a gleam became discernible from below. The monk said that inside the rock there seemed to be a kind of gem, and he asked my uncle whether he should remove it. My uncle told him not to touch it and requested those around him to bring a length of cloth. As about ten people held a large piece of fabric at the foot of the rock, my uncle directed the monk to let the luminous object drop onto it. To general excitement, we saw a luminous, scintillating, egg-shaped rock, turquoise in color, fall. People rushed to amass handfuls of the sacred earth that had fallen with the stone. Then began the festivities, which lasted for several days.

Another edifying example of a terma is related to the rediscovery of the seventeen upadeśa tantras,⁴ considered the core of the Dzogchen Total Perfection teaching. These seventeen tantras were taught by Vimalamitra,⁵ a great Dzogchen master, to Myang Tingdzin Zangpo,⁶ who in turn taught them to Ba Lodrö Wangchug (circa ninth century) and so on. Vimalamitra also concealed a copy of these tantras in a temple that was constructed at his behest. One hundred years later, the king Langdarma⁷ destroyed many Buddhist temples and monasteries, yet the devastation did not affect the transmission of the seventeen tantras that continued within the Ba family, simply from father to son, without any institutional backing. With the passing of time, however, serious doubts arose among teachers about the authenticity of these texts and the related teachings handed down in the Ba family, owing to the fact that no extant copies were available for collation, as was the norm for tantric texts. However, one day the monk serving as guardian of the temple built by Vimalamitra dreamed that a text was hidden

inside a column of the temple; a few weeks later the dream recurred. He asked permission to probe inside the pillar, and searching, he discovered the seventeen upadeśa tantras, handwritten in gold letters on black paper, hidden by Vimalamitra. When the two versions were compared, only a few discrepancies with the Ba family texts were found.

Like earth termas, mind termas also enjoy vast popularity in the Tibetan spiritual milieu, especially among followers of the Nyingma, the oldest school of Tibetan Buddhism. I had a remarkable experience in this regard when I stayed a few months with rigdzin Changchub Dorje⁸ at his *gar*⁹ near Gojo¹⁰ in eastern Tibet. Among the local population, Changchub Dorje was known as an exceptionally gifted traditional doctor. Although he lived in the manner of a farmer and behaved in a simple and humble way, he was also an outstanding Dzogchen master, the discoverer of many mind termas. During my stay at his settlement, I received the transmission of one of his mind treasures titled Ocean of the Teaching, Union of Transmitted Precepts, a truly marvelous Dzogchen teaching.

Since rigdzin Changchub Dorje could hardly read and was unable to write, he dictated his revelations and a disciple would transcribe them. Knowing that, I offered to act as scribe should he have something to dictate. One day, asking me to help him with the second part of the Ocean of the Teaching, Union of Transmitted Precepts, he began to dictate that teaching, and he continued for many days until its completion. He would transmit the words of the teaching while examining patients and calming the qualms of those who came to seek his advice. As he constantly interrupted the dictation in order to speak with patients, I thought surely the resulting text would be discontinuous and fragmentary. However, in the evening, when I read what he had said to me during the day, I was dumbfounded to see that the composition was perfect both in form and style, without a single word missing, seemingly dictated without a break. Given that rigdzin Changchub Dorje was almost illiterate, this outcome was even more remarkable: no scholar, however learned, would have been able to write such an essential teaching of Dzogchen.

These examples are a glimpse into the immensely rich tradition represented by the hidden treasure teachings of Tibet, the method

through which the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States emerged in our world.

THE REAL SENSE OF *THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD*

Known in Tibetan as the Great Liberation through Hearing, this book is a manual of instructions to guide the dying person on the difficult path of the moment of death, and the deceased person in the bewildering postmortem state as he or she wanders in confused search for a new life. The reader first needs to awaken to the awareness that death is an inevitable part of life. If we truly know that, our life becomes more meaningful, so we can face death when it knocks on our door and are prepared to use that crucial time for self-realization.

Human life is characterized by three certainties: certainty that one day we will die; certainty that the moment of death cannot be predicted; and certainty that the secondary causes of death are unforeseeable. We human beings are born into this world, we grow to adulthood, and at the end of our life, we die. This is an undeniable reality, valid for all living beings. The very moment of birth contains also the certainty of death. Receiving a bouquet of beautiful, fragrant flowers may delight us, but at the same time we know that in a few days the flowers will wither and be thrown away. In the same way, after birth there is death, after union separation, after accumulation depletion, and so forth. None of those who are born and who live in the dualism of cyclic existence¹¹ transcend this natural condition. To say that one day death will come for each human being is unnecessary, in much the same way we know that although we may stay at a fine hotel in pleasing comfort for some days, after a while we must leave and go elsewhere. Similarly, now we cherish this body to which we are so attached, but one day our consciousness will go elsewhere, our body left behind: this is absolutely certain.

Apart from supreme masters such as Padmasambhava and Vimalamitra¹²—who, while alive, transferred their material bodies into the nature of light, thus realizing the great transfer¹³ into the rainbow body—whoever is born and lives in this world will die. Even a totally realized being like Buddha Śākyamuni clearly manifested the passage into *nirvāṇa*.¹⁴ All the famous

illumined masters who have appeared in this world have likewise passed away, just as the great kings and all those who possess power and wealth with sovereignty over many lands, armies, and so on will one day die, unable to change that destiny. Thus realized masters have said, "In truth no one can remain in this world without dying." It is of crucial importance that we become definitively aware that this statement corresponds completely to our actual situation.

Even though it is certain that at the end of our lives we must die, when this will happen is by no means knowable. Most human beings consider that death will overtake them in old age with the depletion of the life force when the organism has difficulty remaining alive and at a certain point the flow of breath ceases, like an oil lamp that has exhausted its fuel. It is superfluous to say that the inevitability of death in old age is part of the nature of existence, although many believe that death comes only at this point. However, since all of us live in relation to outer conditions, no guarantee exists that death will occur only when we are old. Apart from the aged, many unborn die while still in their mothers' wombs, many youths die from illness or in accidents, and still others die as adults due to unfortunate circumstances.

For example, one autumn when I was a child, some members of my family invited about ten young people from the local area to gather fodder in the hills, and I accompanied them. In the evening the youths made piles of the grass they had cut from the hillsides and prepared a place to sleep. That night after supper they drank *chang*¹⁵ and stayed up late, singing, dancing, and sharing a carefree time. Finally all of us lightheartedly went to sleep on the hay. The following morning, one young girl, motionless on the hay, seemed still asleep. After a while the others went to call her for breakfast and to start work, but they could not awaken her. On closer observation, they discovered that the girl was cold and dead: she had died suddenly, with no previous illness or other warning. I myself was a witness to this happening. Young people may believe, "I am young, death is still far away," but instead must train themselves to be constantly aware that the moment of death cannot be foretold.

We human beings expect in our lives to endure the sufferings of birth, old age, and sickness, and we believe that death will overtake us due to a secondary cause, such as illness. Instead, the

causes leading to death are unforeseeable: in reality our life very much resembles a candle lit in an unsheltered space. In the open, a wind can arise unexpectedly from any direction, from above or below, and when the wind blows, no guarantee exists that at some point the candle might not be extinguished. In the same way, our life is surrounded by countless secondary causes related to circumstances of time and place that can lead to sudden death.

Therefore, if we are not guided by awareness of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, with the passing of hours, days, weeks, months, and years, continuing to remain alive can become very difficult.¹⁶ The causes that provoke death are numerous: many die earning their livelihood, due to a work accident. Others, blinded by desire and hatred, die in personal conflicts, others still in war, while some commit suicide, oppressed by suffering because of an obsessive relationship or desperate about the conditions in which they live. The important point to understand is that we can die not only of old age or because of a serious illness: in the course of life we chance upon many secondary causes that can lead to death. The constant presence and awareness of this fact must be kept alive in us.

Terror or fear of death is a clear sign that we are not aware of the nature of the human condition. Some people cannot bear even to hear the word *death* mentioned. Although they see with their own eyes that others die or that the number of friends and relatives is gradually diminishing, they hold stubbornly to the idea that death will never strike them personally. They live deceiving themselves as long as possible in the hope that they will succeed in escaping death, though, in truth, nobody knows a way to elude death. Such people, unexpectedly struck by a fatal illness or a serious accident, risk being overcome by agonizing fear.

From the very moment of birth, death is part of our natural condition, and there is no need to be fearful or terrified. Accepting our condition as it is, we also need to understand the nature of the moment of death and what can truly benefit us at that time. Limiting ourselves to recognizing this reality is not sufficient; now that all the favorable conditions are present, we must endeavor to make this knowledge concrete.

THE MOMENT OF DEATH, THE INTERMEDIATE STATE, AND REBIRTH

The three states—the moment of death, the intermediate state between death and rebirth, and rebirth—are similar to the three phases of falling asleep, dreaming, and awakening. At night when we fall asleep, first of all the senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and the mind—gradually withdraw internally, while the objects of the senses, such as beautiful or ugly forms, pleasant or unpleasant sounds, good or repugnant odors, delicious or disgusting flavors, smooth or rough tactile sensations, and positive or negative objects of the mind vanish from the domain of perception. As a result, the sense consciousnesses—visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental—also withdraw internally, and we fall asleep.

As the body lies sleeping, following an interval of variable duration after the moment we have fallen asleep, the mental consciousness, accompanied by the visual and other sense consciousnesses, awakens and manifests as a mental body that experiences the dream state. All the bad, good, or neutral dreams that appear on the basis of various transient factors are called the dream state. The visions we experience during this state seem tangible to us, and for this reason happiness and suffering are perceived as real by the mental body. But when we rouse ourselves from sleep and the vision of another day begins, we clearly understand that all the apparitions in the dream were unreal, with the result that as soon as we awaken, the dream feelings of pleasure and pain vanish. Once linked again to our daily visions, our visual consciousness together with the other sense consciousnesses resumes functioning continuously with the support of their respective organs. Thus another day passes as we experience uninterrupted the various phases of happiness and suffering relative to our concrete situation.

It needs to be clearly recognized that these three states—sleep, dream, and waking life—in the real condition of each individual are closely linked to the three phases of death, the intermediate state, and rebirth, and that they constitute more than a vague analogy to the three latter phases. On the basis of this fundamental correspondence, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* explains four intermediate states:¹⁷ the intermediate state of living, the intermediate state of the moment of death, the

intermediate state of reality, and the intermediate state of rebirth.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF LIVING

The period that begins from the moment we obtain this precious human body endowed with freedoms and qualities,¹⁸ followed by birth and the course of life that endures until we die, is called the intermediate state of living or the natural intermediate state between birth and death. This is our own life, with all the visions and experiences characteristic of our specific condition.

How does this situation come about? The notion of “self” and “others” arises when we are ignorant of our primordial nature, and the illusion of duality begins to establish itself. Feeling attachment for what we like and aversion for what we dislike opens the way for the spread of emotions, and influenced by these emotions, we engage in actions that we have a propensity to repeat. When these tendencies, strengthening and expanding, become anchored in the mind, cyclic existence unfolds as a particular form of life in a particular realm. This is karmic vision, that is, a vision created by our past actions.

A vision shared by one or more classes of beings is called a realm. Fundamentally, the realms of existence are a creation of habitual tendencies, also called karmic traces, formed by the long-term persistent recurrence of the various emotions. Five emotions exercise the strongest influence on us, namely desire, hatred, ignorance, pride, and envy, considered six if all five emotions are considered together. Accordingly, beings can be born in six realms of existence. Beginning from the lowest, these are the hells, the realm of hungry ghosts, the animal realm, the human realm, the realm of the demigods, and the god realm.

The hell realms are a vision produced by aversion and deep-seated anger. Not to be found anywhere as a location, these visions are due to the power of past actions: in one of the hells the suffering of scorching heat is experienced, in another the suffering of freezing cold. The first is an inferno in which all is incandescent, an unimaginable fire. The second is an iced-over wasteland whose bitter grip is inescapable. The inhabitants of the hot and cold hells are imprisoned in these dreadful worlds for aeons with no chance of escape. When the causes exist,

neighboring hells also manifest where beings experience manifold sufferings that have accrued to them as a result of their particular negative actions.

The realm of the hungry ghosts is produced by attachment and craving for possessions. The suffering of hunger and thirst continuously afflicts these hungry spirits, whose stomachs are huge and barrel-like and whose necks are so thin that nothing larger in diameter than a needle can be swallowed. Because of past negative actions, they cannot find food or water to quell their hunger and thirst. If they do find water, it evaporates on reaching their mouths; food, even if chewed, cannot be swallowed, or if swallowed with great difficulty, becomes an agonizing fire on reaching the stomach.

The animal realm is produced by ignorance. These beings, unaware of their real condition, become apathetic and distracted. Drowsiness, darkness, and forgetfulness follow, accompanied by laziness and stupidity. As a result, being born among animals entails manifold ways of suffering: fear, lack of protection, enslavement, being devoured by bigger animals or by other beings, and so on.

The human condition is produced by the totality of emotions.¹⁹ In the human realms, beings experience manifold afflictions, principal among them the ordeals of birth, sickness, old age, and death, but also the suffering of separation from those we love, of not receiving what we want, and so on.

The realm of the demigods is produced by envy. Envy manifests as the attitude of always comparing oneself invidiously with others, leading to the obsessive thought of deserving the qualities, wealth, and so on that is possessed by others but that one lacks. Feeling this emotion in a habitual way produces birth among the demigods. The habitat, physical form, and possessions of the demigods resemble those of the gods, although the prestige of the former is inferior. For this reason they envy the higher status of the gods and live in continuous struggle with the gods for supremacy.

The god realm is produced by pride. Pride manifests as jealousy when encountering superiors, as scorn when encountering people felt as inferior, and as competitiveness when encountering equals. Such emotions are only a source of suffering for oneself. A habitually prideful attitude ripens in birth as a god. The realm of

the gods is the highest among the six realms of existence, although it is still within cyclic existence and therefore of a transitory nature. Some gods live for thousands and thousands of years, enjoying happiness and pleasure, but when the merits that have produced such a birth are consumed and only negative past actions remain, they die and plummet straight into the hells. Seven days before this happens, the gods understand that they are close to death from signs such as losing their radiant complexion, among others, and that they will be reborn in the lower realms; the suffering they experience as a result of this certainty is beyond measure.²⁰

Drifting from one place to another in these six realms is called cyclic existence. To those who wander in these realms experiencing manifold sufferings, the appearance of the external world seems very concrete, as does the internal world of thoughts and feelings, but both are only illusory visions. Devoid of any concrete and true existence, all of our perception and vision depends on the condition of our mind: for example, mother of pearl is commonly perceived as white in color, but a person with jaundice will see it as yellow because his or her sight is distorted by the illness. Likewise, beings have different perceptions and visions that conform to the habitual tendencies formed by their past actions. This is explained in the Buddhist tradition in the following anecdote: one day, representatives of the six realms met on the bank of a river. Even though they were all in the same place and gazing at the same water, each of them perceived it differently, due to their different karmic causes. The denizens of the hells saw the water as flames and ice; the hungry ghost saw blood instead of water; a fish, representing the animal realm, saw the water as its habitat; the human being saw the water as a liquid that could slake his thirst; the demigod saw a battlefield; and the god saw a luminous paradise of nectar.

We live deceived by the duality of the perceiving subject and the object perceived, unaware that all is a vision of the mind, and thereby our negativities and errors create an ever denser cloud of unknowing, preventing us from seeing reality. In this way, ignorance of our primordial state takes firmer root. Yet even though the intermediate state of life, which includes childhood, maturity, and old age, comes about because we ignore our primordial nature, it also offers a unique opportunity: to realize

the aim of human life. Realizing the aim of human existence cannot mean simply becoming affluent and able to procure daily needs such as food, clothing, and housing. Other beings in our world also possess the ability to satisfy temporary necessities, but this is not sufficient to realize the qualities that characterize the fortunate human birth or its related intellective capacities. Acknowledging that the possibilities offered by human life are exceptional and have an immense value, expressed in the well-known definition of humans as beings capable of speaking and understanding and of knowing how to read, write, and express themselves through language, each of us should strive to realize in this life the aim of human existence. We can do this by learning the positive and negative circumstances in world history from antiquity until the present moment and by studying both the limited religious or philosophical traditions that have existed and the clarifying explanations of Dzogchen and other teachings that transcend all limits. Thus we can take the opportunity to reeducate our minds by listening to the instructions of a perfect master and by studying the profound original tantras and crucial teachings.²¹

Through meditation we are able to experience the ultimate meaning directly in ourselves, transcending any doubt about the state of the true condition. Liberation during the intermediate state of living, our present life, can be accomplished through the methods of instruction that eliminate uncertainties about knowledge, like a swallow returning to its nest. The swallow enters its nest naturally with assurance, without the least hesitation; likewise, having resolved perplexities about the words and the significance of the teaching through listening and reflection, we train in the practice of the teaching by meditating in order to dispel any doubts about the true state we have discovered.

Our condition as human beings differs completely from that of other inhabitants of our world. The elephant, for example, is an animal endowed with great strength, but even though its might is far superior to ours, it is tamed and exploited by us. Why? Because even if our physical strength is inferior, the elephant's intelligence is not comparable: through the ingenuity of *Homo sapiens*, weapons we have created can reduce an entire country to dust. We have seen this clearly with our own eyes.

In the intermediate state of living, we have every possibility to obtain knowledge, but if we do not seek to discover the authentic nature of our condition, we will never have this understanding and instead pass our lives in distraction, procuring the necessities for subsistence and in activities conditioned by the dualistic concepts of attachment and aversion. Moreover, the day we face the experiences of the intermediate state at the moment of death, we will inevitably separate from our cherished body and, unaccompanied, proceed alone, overcome by boundless terror.

Although it is true that during the intermediate state of reality, the authentic condition of our primordial state manifests clearly and nakedly as sound, light, and rays,²² it is also true that if we have not had any experience of that state, we will not recognize these appearances as our primordial energy, and they will be a cause only for fright. Once again we will lose consciousness and be compelled to wander helplessly in the intermediate state of rebirth. Consequently, now while we find ourselves in this period of the intermediate state between birth and death and are endowed with intelligence, willpower, and many other natural qualities, we must not waste this extremely precious human life. On the contrary, we must realize the nature of the clear light that is the essence of the mind, and in that way prepare for the intermediate state of the moment of death and for the intermediate state of reality.

During our lifetime, we should rely on an authentic spiritual teacher who, by means of various methods, introduces us to the knowledge of our primordial state. Through study and meditation, we can deepen our spiritual practice, strive for mastery in it, and dispel all doubts so that at the moment of death we are able to recall the knowledge of meditation acquired in life. If we can do that, even though the moment of death may bring anguish and bewilderment, the possibility of attaining enlightenment exists.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF THE MOMENT OF DEATH

After the intermediate state of life, a human being enters the intermediate state of the moment of death, which begins when the signs of approaching death manifest and ends when the

visions of the intermediate state of reality appear. Liberation during the intermediate state of the moment of death can be accomplished through a method of instruction that makes what is obscured appear clearly, likened to a lovely young woman gazing at herself in a mirror. Explaining this, the texts of Ati Dzogpa Chenpo state that during their lives, practitioners endowed with presence and awareness must comprehend perfectly the instructions found in special teachings transmitted by great masters over the centuries based on the great masters' own experiences. These instructions enable us to grasp that the experiences and visions that arise in the intermediate states of the moment of death and of reality, and all apparitions in those states, are none other than our own manifestations, as in the example above of the woman who, on looking at herself in a mirror, sees her own features clearly.

At the point when it is clear that the humors and organic components of the body are totally disordered due to illness or an accident and that the malfunctioning of the elements has placed our life in danger, we need to examine ourselves for the outer, inner, and secret signs of approaching death. Approaching death is indicated by many signs,²³ such as:

- The flesh under the nails loses its coloration as circulation to the extremities fails.
- The color of the irises fades.
- The hair on the head stands on end and remains that way.
- The humming normally heard when the ears are covered wanes.
- Turning one's back to the sun at dawn, one no longer sees a smoky halo.
- Placing the right fist at the forehead and looking toward the light, one cannot see the line of the wrist.

A widespread method for determining whether death is about to occur is called examining the life form: on a full-moon night, raise and stretch out your arms to the sides, standing with your legs apart and your back to the moon. Gaze at the center of your shadow cast on the ground for about twenty minutes, and then

look into space, where the image of your body will appear. An incomplete image indicates energy imbalances in your body, and it is also possible to understand which organs are compromised. A headless image signifies that death is very near.

Having recognized the presence of a sign of approaching death, we must try in every possible way to apply methods to save ourselves from death by paying a ransom:²⁴ externally by accumulating merits, internally through interdependent methods, and secretly through long-life practice.²⁵ Popular tradition also has many ritual acts for saving those near death. For example, relatives and friends might free animals destined for slaughter, such as fish caught in nets or sheep about to be butchered, ideally as many in number as the years of life of the gravely ill person. In another well-known custom called the golden bridge, the family of the ailing person has long-life mantras carved on stones that are then placed in a river or stream so that the water flows over them continuously. Another system is known as the thundering sound: the nearest monastery would be asked to strike a gong or blow a conch-shell horn resoundingly, summoning everybody to prayer, or requesting people living within earshot to say prayers to save the moribund person's life.

When death draws near and the time has come to lie on our bed for the last time, to wear the last clothes, eat the last food, drink the last water, and consign our last words to a testament, the following signs will manifest:

- When the pure aspect of the subtle and gross channels manifests, the eyes grow dim.
- When the pure aspect of the water element manifests, the saliva and mucus dry.
- When the pure aspect of the air element manifests, the breathing becomes labored and agitated.
- When the pure aspect of the spleen manifests, the tongue no longer moves.
- When the pure aspect of the kidneys manifests, the ears adhere to the head.
- When the pure aspect of the liver manifests, the lips do not close.
- When the pure aspect of the bones manifests, the teeth

blacken.

- When the pure aspect of the lungs manifests, the nose sags.
- When the pure aspect of the flesh manifests, the jaw slackens.
- When the pure aspect of the body hair manifests, the eyebrows bristle.
- When the pure aspect of the vital energy manifests, a hiccup is emitted.

When all the ways and means to avoid death by paying a ransom are exhausted, when every ability to move has disappeared, and mental functions, meaning thoughts and the awareness of thinking, cease, we are on the point of parting from the vision of this life and from our cherished body. Now the most secret sign of death, the gradual dissolution of the elements, manifests:

- When the coarse aspect of the earth element dissolves into its own subtle nature, physical force vanishes, it becomes impossible to arise, and the mind dims. In this moment, great fear is felt, accompanied by the sensation of falling over a dreadful precipice, even though the dying person remains in bed.
- When the coarse aspect of the water element dissolves into its own subtle nature, liquids issue from the nose and mouth, urine can no longer be retained, the eyes turn backward, the ears no longer hear sounds, and the mouth and nose become dry. In this moment, great fear is felt, accompanied by the sensation of plummeting into deep water.
- When the coarse aspect of the fire element dissolves into its own subtle nature, the body heat dissipates, beginning from the arms, legs, and the midpoint between the eyebrows; the complexion fades; and consciousness sinks into obscurity. In this moment, great fear is felt, accompanied by the sensation that the body is being flung into a terrifying pit of fire.
- When the coarse aspect of the air element dissolves into its own subtle nature, breathing becomes labored and agitated, internally consciousness blurs, and presence disappears. In that moment, a great fear is felt, accompanied by the harrowing sensation that the body is being swept up in a

hurricane.

- When the subtle aspect of the air element dissolves into consciousness, respiration suddenly ceases. Because the white and red elements lose their normal functions, the three lights preceding the manifestation of luminous clarity, known as appearance, increase, and attainment, or also whiteness, redness, and blackness, arise one after the other.²⁶

If in life we have practiced the instructions that are indispensable to follow during the intermediate state of the moment of death and have experienced a result, at this time we must remember the essential points. However, with the approach of the moment of death, a person undergoes great suffering and extreme distress, both physically and mentally: physically because of the disturbance to the body's elements, and mentally because of the gradual loss of self-control and the consequent rise of anguish, dismay, and terror. In this truly terrible moment, it is very difficult to maintain awareness throughout the experiences and visions that manifest.

Nonetheless, while we are concretely experiencing and discovering the relations linking the body with the five coarse elements, we must maintain awareness and not allow ourselves to be dominated by dualistic thoughts. We should continue in the awareness of our authentic condition, that is, in the natural state of pure awareness. Even those who during life could recognize perfectly the state of pure awareness will not be able to avoid experiencing all the sensations of the moment of death when they come to this intermediate state. However, since all these sensations exist only in relation to the mind, they abide in the essence of mind or pure awareness. Thus, just like frightful reflections cannot damage the mirror in which they appear, these experiences of mental suffering will dissolve naturally.

When these signs indicative of the process of death manifest clearly, it is the right time to put into practice the instructions received during your lifetime and to perform the transference of consciousness. To transfer consciousness generally means to send the consciousness upward through the central channel²⁷ into a pure dimension, thereby blocking the cycle of rebirth. According to the Dzogchen teaching, three types of transference exist. The

first, that of the dimension of reality (*dharma**kāya*), is for practitioners of the highest capacity. These practitioners are able to abide continuously in contemplation in the presence of the primordial state beyond the duality of subject and object. For them, there is nothing to transfer anywhere: this is the supreme transference. At the moment of death they remain aware of their own natural luminosity and thereby spontaneously attain liberation. For this to happen requires that during your lifetime you have experienced the clear light, that is, you have recognized your inner luminosity and dwelled in this condition without disturbance by thoughts during sleep, a state that bears close resemblance to the moment of death.

Those unable to do this but who, during their existence, have nonetheless applied the gradual practices of the tantric path of transformation, can transform themselves at the moment of death through visualization into the deity²⁸ meditated on during life. Thereby they do not fall prey to the illusory nature of the intermediate state. Through such a transformation they realize the clear-light nature of their minds and attain realization in the dimension of perfect enjoyment (*sambhogakāya*). This is the second type of transference for practitioners of middling capacity.

Finally, the third type of transference, that of the dimension of emanation (*nirmāṇakāya*), is for practitioners of low capacity. Applying specific visualizations, they transfer the consciousness through the central channel, raising it through the crown of the head into a pure realm. Usually this type of transference is effected by oneself, although a teacher or practitioner who has perfectly mastered its practice can also perform it on behalf of someone else. In Tibet it was customary to call a spiritual teacher or practitioner skilled in this practice when death was about to occur in order to transfer the consciousness of the dying person.

Since at this point the vital energy is still present in the body, if the transference of consciousness has not been performed successfully in the way just described, and if the person during life formed a connection with the path of liberation and had some meditative experience of it, an expert spiritual friend should insert a bamboo straw or similar instrument in the ear of the dying person, the right ear of a male or the left ear of a female, and remind the person of the spiritual teachings he or she has received. You should prevent the dying person from becoming

bewildered and overcome by fear and from losing awareness by encouraging the recognition of the experiences and visions encountered as manifestations of himself or herself. Accordingly, the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States says: "Instead, if the body of the deceased is present, in the interval that follows the cessation of the outer breath, the Great Liberation should be read aloud by a spiritual teacher, by a spiritual brother or sister, a faithful practitioner, or a good friend, placing the lips close, but not touching, the ear of the deceased."

When breathing ceases, the vital energy enters the central channel that represents the state beyond duality, and remains there for a while. Then, for the first time, the clear light, the essence of the mind and the primordial state of the individual, manifests fully and nakedly. To help the dying person recognize the clear light as his or her own nature, read aloud the words of the Great Liberation through Hearing, as found in the translation from the Tibetan of the main text that follows.

Reminded in that way, the deceased will have an opportunity to attain the reality (*dharma**kāya*) dimension of enlightenment. Hearing read aloud the words of the Great Liberation kindles recognition of the nature of the intermediate state and is particularly useful to a dying person who has had meditative experience of the clear light of reality during life. If that is the case, the person, based on previous experience, will perceive the naked clear light as it manifests at the moment of death like a child who, in the middle of a crowd and confusion, will see his or her own mother. For this reason, the moment of recognition is likened to the reunion of a mother and son. Thus experienced yogins and yoginīs will be able to recognize the clear light of the base and remain in that state without distraction.²⁹

For those who lack this familiarity, the vision of the clear light might last only a fleeting moment and therefore be difficult to recognize, or become the cause of bewilderment and fear. If the dying person misses this chance for liberation, another possibility to recognize the clear light will present itself soon after the vital energy has emerged through one of the bodily orifices and the so-called clear light of the path manifests. To guide an advanced practitioner at this point, repeat the explanation just given.

The Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and Moon suggests the following direct method, called the indivisibility of

space and pure awareness, for those who have familiarized themselves with advanced meditation practices of the clear light during their lives: “At the time of death, remain in a state in which no distinction between observer and observed exists and thus in a state beyond judgment of the visions that appear externally. Abide without distraction in the presence of your own awareness that is pure from the beginning. If you apply this method, the vision of your own inner radiance will manifest fully.”

To guide a less advanced practitioner, read aloud the description of the meditation deity with whom the dead person has become familiar during life. An inexperienced person can be guided by describing the form of Avalokiteśvara and by advising him or her to focus with intense trust on that deity. Helped by these means, the assisted person can attain liberation.

To read to the dying person or to the deceased the introduction called the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States is of crucial importance. Since during the intermediate states hindrance by the physical senses no longer exists, and the consciousness is much clearer, understanding of the teaching is enhanced. The deceased can apply the instructions that lead to natural liberation more effectively, dissolving themselves in the pure nondual condition beyond all limits.

For those who have had no contact with or experience of the path that leads to liberation and therefore did no spiritual practice during their lives, it is extremely important to apply correctly the following methods as soon as the process of death begins: substances that bring liberation by tasting³⁰ should be placed in the dying person’s mouth; before respiration stops, an experienced friend should chant the peerless and profound Song of the Vajra³¹ or at least the syllables’*a a ha sha sa ma* (ձ_ԱՇ_ԱՌ_Ա), the Essence of the Six Spaces of Samantabhadra,³² so that the sounds are audible to the person; and then a circle of mantras that brings liberation by wearing,³³ with the inscription facing inward, should be placed on the chest of the dying person. This done, the person, by virtue of the energy of the Six Liberations,³⁴ will certainly enter the path of liberation of Ati Dzogpa Chenpo in the future and attain total freedom from the suffering of cyclic existence.

WAYS OF DYING

Yogins and yoginis approach death in three different ways according to three levels of capacity: low, middling, and highest. Practitioners with low capacity are unable to recognize the experiences they undergo at the time of death as expressions of the energy of their primordial state. Consequently they become confused and unable to remain in the pure primordial condition, and they continue to wander farther into the intermediate state of rebirth. Their response to the various intermediate states is no different from those who did not follow any spiritual teaching during their lifetimes. Practitioners of middling capacity die like a lion, a hermit, or a pauper, that is, not creating problems for the friends and relatives they leave behind. Well aware of what death is, they do not become overwhelmed by bewilderment or fear.

Practitioners of the highest capacity do not need to apply any particular method or require any instruction relating to the moment of death. As their pure awareness unifies directly with the pure primordial condition, their physical remains disappear into the essence of the elements, and thereby they realize the rainbow body. This supreme achievement is effected by practicing *thödgal*,³⁵ a direct method of the Dzogchen transmission in which the yogin or yogini, through contemplation, merges his or her pure inner awareness with its outer manifestations. In this way, some days after death, the body dissolves into pure luminous energy so that no tangible traces remain except hair and nails, whose impure nature is demonstrated by their continual growth. The supreme form of the rainbow body, the great transfer, in which a living being transmutes into light without manifesting death, was first achieved by the renowned Dzogchen masters Garab Dorje, Padmasambhava, and Vimalamitra. The rainbow body is not a legend from the ancient past, for a stream of masters and yogins and yoginis continue to manifest its attainment even today.

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF REALITY

As a sign that the functions of the consciousness of the deceased person have dissolved into space, the body becomes inanimate

rocklike matter, and the breath vanishes in the air. The pure awareness of the deceased flares upward like a spark, and simultaneously the coarse and subtle material visions as well as thoughts cease completely. This marks the beginning of the intermediate state of reality that arises as a vision of the primary energy³⁶ of pure awareness.

For those who have succeeded perfectly in entering the path of ultimate freedom during their life and have acquired experience of it, specific instructions for the intermediate state of reality exist that instill certainty that all visions are one's own manifestation and offer the possibility of obtaining liberation with the ease of a son bounding into his mother's arms. These instructions explain the visions gained through the development of experiences³⁷ during our lifetime and clarified by the spiritual teacher as our own manifestation, and the visions arising in this phase of the intermediate state, in terms of the metaphor of son and mother. The instant these two visions meet, the mother wisdom and son wisdom recognize each other, and thus liberation is attained.³⁸

In the intermediate state of reality, all appearances manifest completely in the form of five-colored lights to those who have experienced the essential points of the practice. This phase is called space dissolving into luminous clarity. When luminous clarity dissolves into the state of union,³⁹ the body manifests as light, and all visions arise as infinite light forms of the buddha families⁴⁰ grouped in clusters of five. Those who did not enter into spiritual practice during life will experience instead only a state of darkness similar to fainting.

The intermediate state of reality is a state that resembles the moment we fall asleep, when our five or six senses and their consciousnesses withdraw inside and all thoughts suddenly cease. Those who are well acquainted with the principles of the practice apply special methods of the path that, when realized, permit sleep in a state of awareness, in the presence of the authentic essence of the mind. Although during sleep the mind does not produce thoughts, the flow of pure awareness continues. Those who have this experience recognize all dreams, whether beautiful or abhorrent, as being only dreams. It is for this fundamental reason that practitioners should always consider the practice of the night important. Whoever is able to continue in uninterrupted

presence of pure awareness while asleep will be able to maintain this presence also in the intermediate state of reality, allowing him or her to recognize the vision of the clusters of the buddhas (the entrance), the vision of wisdom (liberation), and the vision of self-perfection (the final accomplishment).⁴¹ These visions will arise one after the other as manifestations of our own nature. We will also recognize as our own state the sound, light, and rays—the self-perfected potentiality of our authentic mind essence—that manifest nakedly and without obscuration by dualistic mind. From that moment we will be totally free from the cage of dualism. This is called direct liberation, known also as meeting your own face in your own manifestation, which signifies certain liberation without obstacles.

THE VISION OF THE CLUSTERS OF THE BUDDHAS OF THE FIVE FAMILIES

The Entrance

The essential point to know about the time of entrance is that it has two phases: pure awareness that enters into light, and light that enters into pure awareness.

Pure Awareness That Enters into Light

Pure awareness that enters into light means that beams of light issue from our heart and unite with the heart of each buddha in the clusters of the five families. With our mind focused on the vision of the clusters, we abide in meditative stability for five days. Although some believe that the term *days* refers to the common meaning of the word, many realized teachers explain that what is meant is days of contemplation, that is to say, the arc of time in which we dwelled steadily in the calm state of meditative stability during the course of our life; this is called a day of contemplation.⁴²

Light That Enters into Pure Awareness

Light that enters into pure awareness means that as soon as we discover, through awareness entering into light, the natural state of pure awareness, we see shafts of light issue from the hearts of the groups of buddhas of the five families that penetrate our heart, and the visions of the clusters immediately dissolve into us. At this point, by simply remembering the instructions on the recognition of our state, we will find ourselves in a dimension of light and thus liberated from the habitual tendencies created by the concept of concrete existence. Moreover, by recognizing our pure awareness, we acquire clairvoyance, and thereby, in that same instant, gain the assurance of irreversible liberation.

The Vision of Wisdom: Liberation

This phase of the method of liberation is called the union that dissolves into wisdom. If, at the time of the entrance, we do not have confidence in the certainty of natural liberation, a white beam of light will stream from our hearts. This light expands, and in front of us appears a luminous white band of light with, at its center, a brilliant white sphere resembling a crystal mirror, adorned with smaller spheres of the other four colors;⁴³ this brilliant white sphere is the natural radiance of mirrorlike wisdom.⁴⁴ Above it manifests a square yellow band of light with, at its center, a brilliant yellow sphere resembling a golden mirror, adorned with small spheres of the other four colors; this brilliant yellow sphere is the natural radiance of the wisdom of equality. Above it manifests a ruby red band of light with, at its center, a sphere of brilliant red light adorned with small spheres of the other four colors; this brilliant red sphere is the natural radiance of the wisdom of discernment. Above it manifests an azure band of light, the color of the autumn sky, with, at its center, a sphere of brilliant blue light resembling a mirror of melded azurite adorned with small spheres of the other four colors; this brilliant blue sphere is the natural radiance of the wisdom of the real dimension of existence.

These are called visions of the unification of the four wisdoms. Since the energy of the manifestation of the action-accomplishing wisdom has not yet been perfected, the green band of light does not appear. If, in this instant, we recall the essential points of the

instructions and recognize the natural manifestation of these visions of wisdom as our own state, such recognition is called the empty space of Vajrasattva, and then and there we gain irreversible certainty of our liberation. In that moment we are freed from the elements because we are separated from the physical body; we are freed from emotions because pure awareness is devoid of impurities; and we are freed from the dualism of subject and object because pure awareness has neither inside nor outside.

The Vision of Self-Perfection: The Final Realization

This phase of the path of final realization is called the wisdom that dissolves in precious self-perfection. The instant that the vision of the four wisdoms dissolves within us, in every direction—above, below, and in the cardinal and intermediate directions—a luminous spherical dimension manifests, its pure blue center the color of an autumn sky, and its periphery surrounded by five concentric circles of black, white, red, yellow, and green lights, transparent and immaterial, both inside and outside. Everything we perceive will appear to us as that spherical dimension of light; this is called the vision of precious self-perfected wisdom or the secret precious dimension. In an instant, the eight modes of manifestation⁴⁵ of this primordial dimension arise simultaneously, as follows:

- When this dimension manifests as compassionate energy, we feel the love of a mother for her only child toward all beings of the three worlds.⁴⁶
- When this dimension manifests as light, its rays pervade all worlds.
- When this dimension manifests as form, all visions appear as one's meditation deity.
- When this dimension manifests as wisdom, all the pure buddha fields appear clearly to our senses.
- When this dimension manifests as nonduality, we dwell totally absorbed in the state of nonconceptual contemplation.
- When this dimension manifests as freedom from limitations,

we realize reality directly.

- When this dimension manifests as the door of impure cyclic existence, we perceive the phenomena of illusory visions as a dream or a magical illusion.
- When this dimension manifests as the door of pure wisdom, we realize the special knowledge of the wisdom of quantity and quality.⁴⁷

In this moment, the instruction, which can be likened to meeting someone we already know, enables us to have confidence in our own manifestations. The instruction that can be likened to an unswerving golden scalpel⁴⁸ enables us to abide in the state of nonconceptual contemplation. Finally, the instruction that can be likened to an arrow that, shot by a skilled archer, does not return enables us to attain directly the state in which all is unified. These three essential instructions should be remembered in every phase of the intermediate state of reality: this point is of paramount importance.

Thus we achieve certainty of final realization through the vision of the precious wisdom of self-perfection, and we manifest all the natural qualities of self-perfected wisdom, such as clairvoyance. When the sun rises in the sky, the splendor of infinite rays of light appears; in the same way, the wisdom of quality and quantity expands in all the worlds. Through the manifestation of the six nirmāṇakāya buddhas,⁴⁹ and so on, uninterrupted benefit arises for beings according to their condition. At that time, eight modes of dissolution⁵⁰ also occur, as follows:

- With the dissolution of energy into energy, the necessity of beings for guidance and guides, that is, the buddhas, vanishes like the sun's rays at twilight.
- With the dissolution of wisdom into wisdom, pure awareness liberates itself in the condition of the base, like a child bounding into his mother's arms.
- With the dissolution of light into light, a state without boundaries becomes apparent, like a rainbow vanishing in the sky.

- With the dissolution of form into form, knowledge shines internally, like the vaselike body of youth.⁵¹
- With the dissolution of nonduality into nonduality, the phenomena of existence blend with the real nature of existence, like water into water.
- With the dissolution of freedom from limitations into freedom from limitations, one abides in reality itself, free of conceptual fixations, like the sky dissolving into space.
- With the dissolution of the door of impure cyclic existence into the door of pure wisdom, *samsāra* and *nirvāna* are gathered in a single sphere, as when a tent rope is rewound.
- With the dissolution of the door of pure wisdom into the essence of the condition of the base,⁵² we take possession of our primordially pure reality, like a snow lion takes possession of a glacier. This final realization of liberation in the primordial state is called self-perfection that dissolves into primordial purity.

Described in the famed *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the manifestations of the forty-two peaceful deities and the fifty-eight wrathful deities that appear in the intermediate state of reality are related to the principle just explained.

The Principle of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities

The peaceful and wrathful deities that appear in the intermediate state of reality, however magnetizing or awe-inspiring they may be, are only a symbol of our real nature. Through that symbol or method, we can approach and realize our nature as the indivisible union of its peaceful and wrathful aspects: this is the real meaning of the peaceful and wrathful deities.

How can we understand in a simple way that our true nature possesses peaceful and wrathful aspects? Observing the condition of the mind, we notice that thoughts, good and bad, are continuously occurring, and with a closer look, we find that their substance and location cannot be ascertained in any way: focusing on them, thoughts disappear. The absence of any trace of thoughts is referred to as the peaceful state or, in Buddhist

terminology, emptiness, a state represented by serene deities. Discovering that emptiness, we may think that nothing exists, yet that itself is another thought that has arisen, which will be followed by other incessantly arising thoughts. This state is known as movement, a quality indivisible from emptiness, and it is represented by wrathful deities. The interdependence of emptiness or peace and of movement⁵³ is our true nature, and also the very meaning of the word *tantra*, or continuity.

In the terminology of the Dzogchen teaching, the peaceful and the moving or wrathful aspects are known respectively as primordial purity (*kadag*) and self-perfected potentiality (*lhundrub*). Primordial purity means that our true nature is empty from the beginning, and consequently pure and free from obscurations. Self-perfected potentiality refers to the qualities of that emptiness that manifest effortlessly whenever the secondary causes are present, just as reflections appear in a mirror when an object is placed in front of it. In our vision of the external and internal worlds, self-perfected potentiality arises inseparably from emptiness. The peaceful and wrathful deities that appear in the intermediate state also manifest through our self-perfected potentiality when secondary causes are present, such as having received an introduction to such deities and a certain degree of meditative experience.

Thus, the methods or *sādhanas* of the various peaceful and wrathful deities discovered by tertöns, the finders of hidden treasures, do not concern death and dying exclusively; they are a means to experience the real meaning of peaceful and wrathful deities while we are alive. Those who have an experience of these methods will be able to face death and the intermediate state from a different perspective. When the peaceful and wrathful deities appear, these practitioners will recognize them as their own true nature manifesting outside themselves, and thus, avoiding a dualistic attitude, have the possibility of liberation.

During the intermediate state, not all beings or all humans have visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities and related images. At that time, the energy of sound, light, and rays, our self-perfected potentiality, manifests in the form of peaceful and wrathful deities only to those who followed authentic teachers during their lifetime, received the transmission of this specific teaching, and had meditative experience on the path, such as, for

example, the clear appearance of the deity according to the Secret Mantra teaching.⁵⁴ At that time, if we recognize these visions as our own energy instead of perceiving them as external objects, and if we remain in that state, the visions themselves become a factor for total liberation from the cage of dualism. Even if we never gleaned a significant experience of the path during our lives, such as the clear appearance of deities, if we are able to maintain uninterrupted continuity of the presence of pure awareness in the intermediate state of reality, we lack nothing of fundamental importance.

The Intermediate State of Rebirth

If, during the previous intermediate states, the deceased has not recognized any of the visions—neither sound, light, and rays nor the peaceful and wrathful deities that have appeared as his or her own manifestations—then that person will wander further into the intermediate state of birth preceding a new life. At this stage, the mind begins to function again and thus habitual tendencies reemerge, causing a collapse into judgment, feelings of happiness and sorrow, and eventually a subsequent birth. For this reason, this development is known as the intermediate state of rebirth.

For those in the intermediate state of rebirth, instructions exist through which the practitioner can direct propensities from past actions toward a favorable rebirth, as when the flow of water in an interrupted pipe is restored. The intermediate state of rebirth is similar to the dream state. When we go to bed, some time after falling asleep, our sense consciousnesses awaken. Then the mental consciousness, together with the other sense consciousnesses, takes form as a mental body, and we experience the most varied dream visions on the basis of circumstances.

In the same way, in the intermediate state of rebirth, the mental consciousness and the other sense consciousnesses of the individual, which for about three days after death have remained as though stunned, reawaken and arise as a mental body. According to circumstances, the visions of the intermediate state of rebirth manifest progressively in their characteristic manner, just as sometimes we start to dream as soon as we fall asleep while on other occasions we dream only after a long time.

Analogously, the duration of the intermediate state of reality cannot be quantified precisely, but the opinion commonly held is that in most cases the mental body manifests three days after death.

Dreams are determined by various factors. Those due to powerful secondary causes are connected to traces from past events—a severe unexpected fright, a violent outburst of anger, or an event during our lifetime that touched us deeply—and manifest when we are deeply asleep. Other dreams connected mainly to daily activities or more recent situations manifest when sleep is light. Similarly, in the intermediate state of rebirth during the first week after death, although we no longer have a body of flesh and blood, we have the impression that we are not dead and that we still live in the human world due to the strong traces of habit from actions in the human life just ended. Almost always, human beings are not aware of being dead, and we feel attachment and anger toward those who are still alive and who, according to the deceased, are behaving wrongly, causing them even greater suffering. This lack of awareness of the deceased becomes the cause for an ulterior accumulation of negative actions through attachment, jealousy, avarice, anger, and hatred.

In this phase, a close friend, dharma teacher, or practitioner of the sacred teaching should read slowly and clearly *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* at the dead person's house. This text enables the deceased to recognize that he or she is dead, that death is everyone's inevitable fate, and that therefore it is useless to be anguished and, moreover, to accumulate negative actions through this attachment and anger. In particular, this book, like a guide that points out the path to a traveler who does not know the way, directly introduces the visions of the intermediate state and their meanings.

If the deceased was Tibetan or understood the Tibetan language, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* should be read in Tibetan. If the dead person spoke English, Russian, or another language, the book should be read in the appropriate mother tongue; this point is of fundamental importance. This is because, during the first week of the intermediate state, the dead person still possesses strong predispositions tied to the nationality, language, and other aspects of the culture to which he or she belonged. Thus knowing how to adapt to the deceased's frame of mind is of

decisive importance.

In the intermediate state of rebirth we possess a body similar to the one we have in dreams, possessing various qualities such as clairvoyance and unimpeded miraculous powers like the capacity to arrive unhindered almost everywhere and to be instantaneously in any place we desire. Beings in this state have a mind seven times clearer than when alive. They possess all their senses and can be seen by those who possess clairvoyance. Recollecting the teachings they received, they can liberate themselves or do so with the help of others, as when a master endowed with knowledge and experience summons the consciousness of a deceased person and imparts instructions to that being.

At this time, if in life we placed trust in the knowledge of the real condition to which we were introduced by an authentic master and had even a slight degree of experience, by simply remembering the pure dimensions of the manifestations of the buddhas,⁵⁵ and by virtue of the reawakening of our past inclinations, we will have the good fortune to be reborn in the Pure Land of Perfect Joy, in the Glorious Pure Land, in the Pure Land of the Lotus Flower Pagoda, or in the Pure Land of Complete and Perfect Action.⁵⁶

In general, the intermediate state lasts forty-nine days, that is, the period from the first to the seventh week after death. However, the deceased may also take a new birth in the first or second week, and so on, depending on individual predispositions from past actions. At the end of each week from the first week onward, what is called the little death occurs, consisting of the mental body of the intermediate state returning into temporary unconsciousness, from which, after some time, it reemerges. At this weekly recurrence, the introduction of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States should be read to the deceased. In Tibet, offerings made to the dead customarily are suitable for their immaterial condition: incense and perfumes are burned, and strongly flavored food, often blended with sacred substances, is offered in order to provide a cause for liberation. In the course of each week, habitual tendencies, karma from the previous life, whether human or other, become fainter. Without a material body, the person has no shadow and no material obstacles, can perform miraculous deeds, no longer depends on

the sense organs, and possesses partial clairvoyance. Moreover, various signs manifest: the six uncertainties, the four terrifying enemies, the three terrible abysses, and others.⁵⁷

At this stage, most dead people recognize that they are in the intermediate state of rebirth. Those who have no awareness of the nature of human life and have not understood the meaning of the introduction to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* will undergo various sufferings, such as finding themselves alone and abandoned in the intermediate state, having left behind the wealth accumulated during their lives as well as relatives and friends, feeling ever more hatred when they understand through a certain degree of clairvoyance the thoughts of friends and relatives and of those who detested them.

The actions accumulated through these experiences can become the causal factor that determines the circumstances of rebirth. In any case, from the fourth week onward the propensities from the karma of past actions that will determine the rebirth of the deceased become stronger, and the visions and impressions connected with them become more intense. Thus it is extremely important in this phase for the dead person never to lose the continuity of presence and awareness and to recall the essential points introduced in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

At the moment of death, signs occur that already indicate in which realm the deceased is going to be reborn. The Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and Moon describes these signs as follows:

- If heat ebbs from the head and the right hand quivers, these signs indicate that the dying person will be born as a god.
- If heat ebbs from the soles of the feet, the left foot quivers, and the eyes turn upward, these signs indicate that the dying person will be born in the hells.
- If heat ebbs from under the right armpit and from the mouth, and the dying person talks nonsense, these signs indicate that the dying person will be born as a demigod.
- If heat ebbs from the genitals, this sign indicates that the dying person will be born as an animal.
- If heat exits from the mouth, the body turns yellow, and the eyes sink inward, these signs indicate that the dying person

will be born as a hungry ghost.

- If heat gathers at the eyes, the dying person speaks clearly, and his or her mind is limpid, these signs indicate birth as a human being.

During the intermediate state of rebirth, various lights indicating the place of rebirth will appear:

- Turning onto the path of white light and having the impression of entering a temple, a chapel, a flower garden, or a pagoda made of precious gems, and so on, are signs of rebirth as a god.
- Turning onto the path of the green light of envy and having the impression of traversing a precipitous craggy mountain, entering a narrow gorge or a sinuous crevice full of thorns, or seeing a circle of fire are signs of rebirth as a demigod.
- Turning onto the path of the yellow light of attachment and having the impression of entering a palace or temple is a sign of human rebirth.
- Following the dark brown light of ignorance and having the impression of entering a cave, a crevasse between rocks or mountains, or a long fissure are signs of rebirth as an animal.
- Following the red light of avarice and having the impression of reaching an arid plain devoid of vegetation or water are signs of rebirth as a hungry ghost.
- Following the dark blue light of hatred and having the impression of entering a narrow valley filled with boulders, a narrow river gorge lashed by water, or a dark house or one made of iron are signs of rebirth as a hell being.

The images of the world of our previous life slowly fade away completely. Once we have chosen one of the paths of colored light, we enter into the vision of the world in which we are to be reborn. Thus we begin yet another series of the intermediate states and continue in the cycle of existence. However, if in this phase a master, summoning the consciousness of the deceased, introduces the primordial nature of the intermediate state, that

person can have the possibility of attaining liberation. Otherwise, reborn as a human being, he or she will return to the world in a family of spiritual practitioners and, having met the sacred teaching, will gradually attain liberation.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu

THE GREAT LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING

Prologue

HEREIN IS CONTAINED the Great Liberation through Hearing, an Elucidation of the Intermediate State of Reality, an extract from the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State*.

I bow before the spiritual teachers, essence of the three dimensions of enlightenment:

To Infinite Light Amitābha, the dimension of reality, the dharmakāya,

To the Peaceful and Wrathful Lotus deities, the dimension of perfect enjoyment, the saṃbhogakāya,

To Padmakara, protector of beings, the dimension of emanation, the nirmāṇakāya.

This Great Liberation through Hearing, the method that liberates yogins and yoginīs of middling capacity during the intermediate states, has three parts: the Premise, the Instructions, and the Conclusion.

Premise

OF FUNDAMENTAL IMPORTANCE, aspiring yogins should train experientially in the progressive levels of the teaching that are the methods by which beings who have physical bodies can achieve liberation. Those of high capacity should certainly attain liberation in their lifetime through the practice of these levels.

If they are not liberated, yogins should perform the transfer of consciousness, as explained in the Transference of Consciousness: Natural Liberation upon Recollection, during the intermediate state of the moment of death. Yogins of middling capacity should certainly be liberated by that method. If they are not liberated through the transfer of consciousness, the following Great Liberation through Hearing¹ should be repeatedly read to the deceased during the intermediate state of reality.

First, yogins should examine the signs of death as explained in Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Signs of Death.² When the signs of the death process are all clearly present, the method of the transfer of consciousness as elucidated in the Transference of Consciousness: Natural Liberation upon Recollection³ should be performed.

If the transference has been accomplished, there is no need to read aloud the Great Liberation through Hearing. If, however, the transference has not succeeded, sit beside the corpse and read aloud the Great Liberation through Hearing with the correct pronunciation and clear diction.

If the body is not present, sit on the bed or customary seat of the deceased. Then, having invoked the power of truth⁴ and summoned the consciousness of the deceased,⁵ read aloud the text of the Great Liberation through Hearing, imagining him or her to be listening in front of you. Relatives and close friends should be advised to contain their grief, because now it is not positive to disturb the deceased with crying and sobbing.

If the body of the deceased is present, following the cessation

of breathing,⁶ the Great Liberation through Hearing should be read aloud by a spiritual teacher or a spiritual brother or sister, a faithful practitioner, or a good friend, with lips placed near, but not touching, the ear of the deceased.⁷



Mandala of Samantabhadra with mantras that liberate through hearing (Illustration Credit fm3.1)



Effigy of the deceased used in funeral rites ([Illustration Credit fm3.2](#))

Instructions

THE INSTRUCTIONS OF the Great Liberation through Hearing are to be implemented in the following order.

First, make substantial offerings to the Three Supreme Jewels.⁸ If this is not possible, arrange on a shrine whatever objects can be mustered as a support for visualization, and visualize immeasurable offerings with the mind.⁹

Then recite the Invocation That Calls the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help¹⁰ three or seven times.

After this, chant melodiously the Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States, the Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate States, and the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States.¹¹

Afterward, read aloud the Great Liberation through Hearing three or seven times, as circumstances permit.

The Instruction section of the Great Liberation through Hearing has three parts: the introduction to the clear light during the intermediate state of the moment of death; the great instruction that introduces the intermediate state of reality; and the introduction to the intermediate state of rebirth, which includes a teaching on the method for obstructing womb entrances.

INTRODUCTION TO THE CLEAR LIGHT IN THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF THE MOMENT OF DEATH

This introduction is intended to assist those individuals who have a good intellectual understanding but who have not yet recognized the clear-light nature of the mind, those who have this recognition but have little familiarity with it, and all ordinary people who have received limited experiential teaching. Receiving this introduction, such individuals, on recognition of the clear light of the base,¹² will attain the unborn enlightened dimension of the dharmakāya in a direct and unobstructed

manner without traversing the intermediate states.

Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base

Ideally, the root spiritual teacher from whom the dying person has personally received instructions should be requested to impart this introduction, or, if he or she cannot be present, a *vajra* brother or sister who has the same meditation commitments should be invited. Otherwise, a spiritual friend who belongs to the same lineage of teaching should come. If none of these can attend, someone with correct pronunciation and clear diction should read aloud the following introduction many times.¹³ In this way, the dying person will recall what the spiritual teacher had introduced to him or her during life and, immediately recognizing the primordial clear light, will undoubtedly attain liberation.¹⁴

The time to impart the introduction is after the outer breath has ceased and the vital energy has been absorbed into the central wisdom channel,¹⁵ when the consciousness of the deceased arises brilliantly as nonconceptual clear light. Afterward the vital energy reverses and instead passes into the right and left channels,¹⁶ and as a consequence the visions of the intermediate state of reality suddenly appear. Hence the introduction to the clear light must be given before the vital energy passes into the right and left channels. For ordinary people, the length of time in which the inner breath¹⁷ remains in the central channel is about the time taken to consume a meal. As for the manner of imparting the actual introduction, it is best to perform the transference of consciousness at the time when the respiration is about to cease.¹⁸ If this is not possible, the deceased should be addressed in the following words:

O Child of Enlightened Nature, [say the name of the dying person], the time has now come for you to seek a path. As soon as your breath ceases, what is known as the clear light of the first intermediate state,¹⁹ which your spiritual teacher introduced to you in the past, will manifest. As soon as respiration ceases, all phenomena will become empty and totally naked, a condition like space. At the same time, a naked pure awareness that is neither inside

nor outside of you will dawn, clear and empty, without center or perimeter. At that moment, recognize this instant presence as your own nature and relax in that state. I, also, will introduce it to you at that time.

Speak these words many times in the ear of the dying person, fixing them firmly in his or her mind, until respiration ceases.

When breathing is on the verge of ceasing, the dying person should be laid on his or her right side in the lion posture,²⁰ and the arteries pressed so as to feel the pulse.²¹ Once the two carotid arteries²² have stopped throbbing, they should be pressed firmly. In that way, the vital energy, having entered the central channel, cannot reverse, and it will definitively emerge through the bregma, the fontanel on the crown of the head.²³ Give the introduction repeatedly at this time.²⁴

This phase is also called the clear light of reality during the first intermediate state. It is the unique and true state of the reality dimension (*dharma-kāya*) of enlightenment that arises in the minds of all sentient beings. It occurs in the period when the vital energy is absorbed in the central channel, after the cessation of respiration (or outer breath) and before the cessation of the inner breath.²⁵ In common speech, this state would be likened to fainting.²⁶ The duration of this experience of the clear light is uncertain. The characteristics, good or bad, of the physical constitution of the dying person and the extent of training in exercises related to channels and vital energy are factors. For those with significant experience in the practice, those who have achieved stability in the calm state,²⁷ or those who have sound energy channels,²⁸ this experience can be protracted.

Persist in giving this introduction, reminding the deceased again and again, until serous fluid oozes from the orifices of the sense organs. For destructive individuals and those who have unsound energy channels, this phase lasts no longer than a snap of the fingers. For others, it may last the time it takes to eat a meal. However, as most sutras and tantras state that the period of fainting lasts for three and a half days, and generally it can be considered to last that long, continue to give the introduction to the clear light for that amount of time.

As for the manner of imparting the introduction: if capable, the

dying person should recall, of his or her own accord, the spiritual teachings received in the past. If the person is not capable of this, then a spiritual teacher, a student, or a member of the spiritual community who is a close friend should be at his or her side and remind the dying person of the signs of death in their accurate sequence, saying:

Now the sign of the dissolution of earth into water manifests, then of water into fire, fire into wind, and wind into consciousness.²⁹

When the succession of signs is nearly complete, encourage the dying person to nurture the altruistic resolve with the words below beginning with, “O, Child of Enlightened Nature!” If the dying person is a spiritual teacher, say the following words softly into his or her ear:

O, Venerable One! I entreat you not to waver from your altruistic resolve.

If the dying person is a spiritual brother or sister or anyone else, call him or her by name and say the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, what is called death is now upon you. Therefore maintaining an altruistic resolve, think in this way:

Alas! I have arrived at the moment of death. I will put this time to good use and will single-mindedly engender an altruistic aspiration. I will meditate on loving kindness, compassion, and a benevolent resolve to attain buddhahood. For the benefit of all beings who are infinite as space, I will realize perfect enlightenment.

In particular, you should think:

At this moment, for the sake of all sentient beings, I will recognize the clear light of death as the reality dimension of enlightenment, and while in that state, I will attain the supreme realization of the Great Symbol,³⁰ and thereby act for the

benefit of all living beings. If I do not achieve enlightenment, then, recognizing the true nature of the intermediate state, I will realize the indivisible dimension of the Great Symbol³¹ during the successive intermediate states. Then I will manifest in a way that enables me to teach each in accordance to his or her need, and I will act for the good of all living beings, who are as limitless as space.

Without parting from the altruistic aspiration of the resolve to attain enlightenment already expressed, remember the spiritual practice of the oral teaching you applied while alive.

Pronounce these words clearly, placing the lips close to the ear of the dying person. Without allowing the attention of the dying person to wander even for an instant, remind him or her of spiritual practice. Then, when respiration has ceased and the two carotid arteries have been firmly pressed, if the dying person was a spiritual teacher or a spiritual friend more advanced than you, remind him or her with the following words:

Venerable One! The clear light of the base has now manifested before you. Recognize it and dwell directly in the state of integration.

For all others, introduce the clear light with these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, [call the name of the person], listen! Pure clear light, reality itself, is now manifesting before you. Recognize it!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, this brilliant emptiness is the radiant essence of your own awareness. It is beyond substance, beyond characteristics, beyond color, completely devoid of any nature whatsoever. This brilliant emptiness is Buddha Samantabhadri, reality itself. The essence of your own instant presence is empty, yet it is not a nihilistic emptiness, but unimpeded radiance, brilliant and vibrant. This wakeful awareness is Buddha

Samantabhadra. Together, these two, the emptiness that is the essence of your own awareness, completely devoid of any nature whatsoever, and your own wakeful awareness, vibrant and radiantly present, are indivisible, the buddha who is the reality dimension of enlightenment. Your own awareness, a vast luminous expanse, clarity inseparable from emptiness, is also the buddha of unchanging light, beyond birth and death. Just to perceive this is enough. If you recognize this brilliant essence of your own awareness as buddha nature, then gazing into it is to abide in the state of enlightenment.

These words should be said three or seven times, repeated with correct diction and clear pronunciation. Thus the deceased will first recollect the instructions formerly received from his or her teacher, and second, will be introduced to his or her own naked awareness as clear light. Third, with this recognition, he or she will attain the reality dimension of enlightenment, beyond union and separation, and will certainly achieve liberation. Recognition of the first clear light takes place in this way.

Introduction to the Clear Light of the Path

If, however, the deceased has not recognized the first clear light, then what is called the second clear light will manifest.³² It is said that this second clear light lasts from the moment the respiration has ceased until little more than the time it takes to eat a meal. The second clear light arises once the vital energy has passed into the right or left channel, depending on the good or bad past actions of the deceased, and once the vital energy has emerged through a body orifice. When this occurs, the consciousness suddenly becomes awake and clear. Although the second clear light lasts approximately the interval stated, the length depends on the condition, strong or weak, of the energy channels and on whether the person has had or lacks meditative experience.

At this point, the consciousness exits from the body, and initially the person may not know that he or she has died. Family and companions are seen as before, and their cries of grief are heard. During this period, before intense and bewildering visions

arise as the result of past actions and before the terrifying experiences related to Yama Dharmaraja³³ occur, instructions should be given.³⁴ The instructions concern both the generation stage and the perfection stage.³⁵ If the deceased was a practitioner of the perfection stage, call him or her by name three times, repeating the introduction to the clear light. If the deceased was a practitioner of the generation stage, read aloud in a clear voice the description of his or her meditation deity as set forth in the related meditation text. Then remind him or her of the following:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature! Meditate on this, your meditation deity. Do not be distracted! Focus intensely on your meditation deity! Meditate that the deity that appears has no reality of its own, an apparition like the reflection of the moon in water. Do not meditate on the deity as though it had a material body.

If the deceased was an ordinary person, begin the introduction by saying:

Meditate on the Lord of Great Compassion.³⁶

Instructed in this way, even those who have not recognized the nature of the intermediate state without doubt will recognize it now. This reminder should be given by a spiritual teacher or a spiritual brother or sister to those who, despite having received instructions from a spiritual teacher during their lives, have little meditative experience and thus cannot recognize the nature of the intermediate state by themselves. Likewise, this instruction is of crucial importance for those who, despite their meditative experience, are bewildered as a result of a serious illness at the time of death and therefore are unable to recall their past spiritual experiences. This instruction is particularly necessary for those individuals who, despite their meditation in the past, are in danger of birth in the lower existences as a result of broken vows and failure to maintain basic commitments.³⁷

It is best if recognition is gained during the first phase of the intermediate state of the moment of death. Should this not occur,

awareness of the deceased can be awakened through a reminder during the second phase of the intermediate state of the moment of death, and thus he or she will attain liberation. This second phase is also called the pure illusory body when the clear light of the path manifests. At this time, consciousness suddenly manifests in all its clarity, even though the deceased may not know that he or she is dead. If the instructions are given at this time, the mother reality and son reality³⁸ can meet, and the deceased will no longer be governed by past actions. Just as darkness is vanquished by the light of the sun, the force of past actions is eliminated by the clear light of the path, and liberation is attained.

Moreover, this second phase of the intermediate state of the moment of death will suddenly appear to the mental body assumed by the deceased, while the consciousness of the deceased is able to hear as before. If, at this time, the oral instruction is given as above, its purpose will be achieved. As the bewildering visions created by past actions have not yet arisen, the deceased is able to direct his or her mind anywhere. Therefore, even though the person may not have recognized the clear light of the base, he or she will attain liberation by recognizing the clear light of the path, the second phase of the intermediate state of the moment of death.

INTRODUCTION TO RECOGNIZING THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF REALITY

If liberation is not attained in that phase, then the intermediate state of reality, also called the third intermediate state, will dawn.³⁹ It is in this state that bewildering visions, the result of past actions, arise. It is therefore of great importance at this point to read aloud the following Introduction to Recognizing the Intermediate State of Reality. It is extremely powerful and beneficial.

Now the grief-stricken kin will be weeping. They will no longer be allotting the deceased a portion of food, they will have removed his or her clothing, undone the bed, and so on. Although the deceased can see them, they cannot see the deceased. Although the deceased can hear them calling, they cannot hear the deceased answering back. The dead person therefore is left in

utter despair. During this time, the three visions of sound, light, and rays manifest,⁴⁰ and the deceased may faint with fright, terror, or awe. Thus, during this phase, the Great Recognition of the Intermediate State of Reality should be given.

Call the deceased by name, and say the following words, with correct pronunciation and clear diction:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen with great attention and without distraction. There are six kinds of intermediate state, namely: the natural intermediate state of living, the intermediate state of dreams, the intermediate state of contemplation, the intermediate state of the moment of death, the intermediate state of reality, and the intermediate state of ensuing rebirth.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, during the death process and after death, you will experience three intermediate states: the intermediate state of the moment of death, the intermediate state of reality, and the intermediate state of rebirth. Until yesterday you experienced the intermediate state of the moment of death. Although during that time the clear light of reality manifested before you, you did not recognize it. Thus you have been compelled to wander here. Now you will experience the intermediate state of reality, followed by the intermediate state of rebirth. Recognize without distraction the instructions and visions I will introduce to you.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, that which is called death has now arrived. You are leaving this world. In this you are not alone. Death happens to everyone. Do not be attached to this life! Do not cling to this life! Even if you stay attached and clinging, you have no power to remain in this world, and you will continue to wander in cyclic existence. Renounce attachment and do not cling! Remember the Three Supreme Jewels.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, whatever fear you may experience when the visions of the intermediate state of reality arise, do not forget the following words. Go onward, keeping their meaning in mind. The crucial point is that through this explanation you can recognize your essential nature.

*Alas! Now, as the intermediate state of reality dawns before me,
Shunning completely any feeling of awe, terror, or fear,
I recognize all that appears as pure awareness, naturally
manifesting,*

*Knowing sound, light, and rays to be apparitions of the
intermediate state.*

Now, having reached this crucial point,

*I will not fear the multitude of peaceful and wrathful deities; they
are my own manifestation.*

Go onward, pronouncing these words distinctly, keeping their meaning in mind. Do not forget them! The essential point is to recognize with certainty that the terrifying visions that arise are your own manifestation.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, when your body and mind separate, pure visions of reality will manifest: subtle and clear, radiant and scintillating, naturally brilliant and awe-inspiring, shimmering like a mirage on an arid plain in the heat of summer. Do not fear them! Do not be terrified! Do not be bewildered! They are the natural luster of your own nature, reality itself. Therefore recognize them as such.

From within these lights, the natural sound of reality will resonate, distinct and deafening, like the roar of a thousand thunderclaps crashing at once. This is the natural sound of your own nature, reality itself. Do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not be bewildered! Now you have a body called the mental body, the result of your proclivities, not a material body of flesh and blood. Therefore, the sounds, lights, and rays of light that manifest cannot harm you, for you cannot die. It is sufficient that you recognize them as your own manifestation. Know that this is the intermediate state.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you have not encountered these present instructions and do not now recognize these visions as your own manifestations, whatever meditative practice you may have done in the human world, you will fear the light, you will be bewildered by the sound, and you will be terrified by the

rays. If you do not understand this central point of the teaching, you will not recognize the sound, the light, and the rays as yourself, and you will continue to wander in cyclic existence.⁴¹

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, should you not have gained recognition and moved on, after having been insensible for three and a half days,⁴² you will reawaken from this unconsciousness and wonder, *What has happened to me?* Recognize this to be the intermediate state. At this time, the phenomena of cyclic existence reverse into their essential nature, and everything arises as lights and the bodies of deities.

The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality

First Day

Now all of space manifests as blue light. On this first day⁴³ of the intermediate state of reality, from the pure central realm called the Pervasive Sphere,⁴⁴ blessed Vairocana, his body white in color, will appear before you, seated on a lion throne with a five-pronged vajra⁴⁵ in his right hand and embraced by his supreme consort, Ākāśadhātvīśvari.

A blue light, radiant and clear, brilliant and scintillating, symbol of the wisdom of the expanse of reality⁴⁶ that is the basic purity of your aggregate of consciousness, will issue from the hearts of Vairocana and his consort, shining piercingly toward your heart, so bright that your eyes cannot endure it. Together with this light, a pallid white light, indicative of the realm of the gods, will also arise, glimmering before your heart. At that point, swayed by the power of negative past actions, you may want to flee in fear and terror from the bright blue light of the wisdom of the expanse of reality and instead feel attracted to the dull white light of the god realms.

In that moment, do not be bewildered by the blue light, radiant and clear, brilliant and scintillating. It is the supreme clear light of wisdom. Do not be terrified! This is

the light ray of the transcendent lord,⁴⁷ the so-called light of wisdom of the expanse of reality. Have faith in it! Yearn for it with longing! Pray with devotion, thinking, *This is the light ray of the transcendent lord Vairocana's compassion. I take refuge in it.* In reality, this is the blessed Vairocana and his consort, come to accompany you on the perilous path of the intermediate state. It is the light ray of Vairocana's compassion!

Do not be enticed by the pallid white light of the god realm! Do not be attracted to it! Do not cling to it! This dull white light is the alluring path formed by your habit of deep ignorance,⁴⁸ which you yourself have engendered. If you become attached to this path, you will wander into the god realm and enter the cycles of existence of the six classes of beings. This dull light blocks the path to liberation. Therefore, do not gaze at it! Long for the radiant blue light! Focus intensely on the blessed Vairocana and repeat after me the following invocation:

Alas! While I wander in the cycle of existence impelled by deep-rooted ignorance,

May the blessed Vairocana guide me

On the path of the radiant light of the wisdom of the expanse of reality.

May the supreme consort Ākāśadhātviśvari, following behind, sustain me.

Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passages of the intermediate state,

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment

By making this invocation with fervent devotion, you will dissolve into rainbow light in the heart of Vairocana, and you will attain enlightenment in the dimension of perfect enjoyment in the central pure buddha field called Densely Adorned.⁴⁹

Second Day

If, however, even after receiving this introduction, the deceased,

because of anger and the shadow of negative actions, is terrified by the light and rays and remains bewildered even though the invocation has been pronounced, then on the second day, Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva's assembly of deities will come to meet him or her, and at the same time traces of past misdeeds that cause rebirth in the hell realms will also emerge.⁵⁰

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her with these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the second day, the water element manifests in utter purity as white light. At that time, from the eastern pure realm called Perfect Joy or Abhirati, the blessed Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva,⁵¹ his body blue in color, will appear before you, seated on an elephant throne with a five-pronged vajra in his right hand and embraced by his supreme consort Buddhalocanā.⁵² They are accompanied by two male bodhisattvas, Kṣitigarbha and Maitreya, and two female bodhisattvas, Lāsyā and Puṣpā. Thus, the forms of six enlightened beings⁵³ will shine before you within an expanse of rainbow light

A white light, snow-like and scintillating, radiant and clear, symbol of mirrorlike wisdom, the basic purity of the aggregate of form, will issue from the hearts of Vajrasattva and his consort, shining piercingly toward your heart, so bright that your eyes cannot endure it. Together with this light of wisdom, a murky light indicative of the realms of the hell beings will also arise, glimmering before your heart. At that point, misled by aversion, you may want to flee in fear and terror from the bright white light and instead feel attracted to the dull light of the hell realms.

Be fearless in that moment. Recognize the white light, snow-like and dazzling, brilliant and clear, as mirrorlike wisdom. Have faith in it! Yearn for it! Pray with devotion, thinking, *This is the light ray of the blessed Vajrasattva, the hook of his compassion. I take refuge in it.* It is the blessed Vajrasattva and his consort, come to accompany you on the perilous path of the intermediate state. It is the light-ray hook of Vajrasattva's compassion. Therefore, long for it!

Do not be enticed by the murky light of the hell realms. This shadowy light is the alluring path formed by the vestiges of negative actions amassed by your own deep anger. If you become attached to it, you will fall into the hell realms, caught in a mire of unbearable suffering with almost no possibility of escape.

This dull light blocks the path to liberation. Therefore, do not gaze at it! Relinquish your hatred! Do not be attached to it! Do not cling to it! Long for the white light, brilliant and dazzling! Focus intensely on the blessed Vajrasattva, and pronounce the following invocation:

Alas! While I wander in the cycle of existence impelled by deep aversion,

May the blessed Vajrasattva guide me

On the path of the radiant light of mirrorlike wisdom.

May the supreme consort Buddhalocanā, following behind, sustain me.

Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passages of the intermediate state,

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment

By making this invocation with fervent devotion, you will dissolve into rainbow light in the heart of Vajrasattva, and you will attain enlightenment in the dimension of perfect enjoyment, in the eastern pure realm called Utter Joy.⁵⁴

Third Day

However, even after receiving this introduction, some persons, after death still in the clutches of pride and the vestiges of negative actions, reject in terror the hook that is the light ray of Vajrasattva's compassion. Thus, on the third day, blessed Ratnasambhava's assembly of deities will come to meet them, and at the same time, the dimly lit path leading to the human realm will appear.⁵⁵

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her with these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the third day, the earth element manifests in utter purity as yellow light. At that time, from the yellow southern pure realm called Glorious Śrimat, the blessed Ratnasambhava, his body yellow in color, will appear before you, seated on a horse throne with a jewel in his right hand and embraced by his supreme consort, Māmaki. They are accompanied by two male bodhisattvas, Ākāśagarbha and Samantabhadra, and two female bodhisattvas, Mālyā and Dhūpā. Thus, the forms of six enlightened beings⁵⁶ will shine before you within an expanse of rainbow light.

A yellow light, golden and dazzling, symbol of the wisdom of equality, the basic purity of the aggregate of feeling, adorned with larger and smaller spheres of rainbow light brilliant and clear, will issue from the hearts of Ratnasambhava and his consort, shining piercingly toward your heart, so bright that your eyes cannot endure it. Together with this light of wisdom, a pallid blue light, indicative of the human realm, will also arise, glimmering before your heart.

At that point, misled by pride, you may want to flee in fear and terror from the bright yellow light and instead be attracted to the pallid blue light of the human realm and feel attached to it. Do not succumb to the dull blue light! In that moment, be fearless. Recognize the yellow light as wisdom, dazzling, brilliant, and clear. Let your pure awareness relax within that light in a state of nonaction. Again, have faith in it! Yearn for it! If you recognize this light as the natural luminosity of your own pure awareness, even though you may not feel longing for it and have not recited the invocation, all the forms of the deities and light rays will merge inseparably within you, and you will become enlightened.

If you are unable to recognize the light as the natural luminosity of your own pure awareness, then pray with devotion, thinking, *This is the light ray of the blessed Ratnasambhava's compassion. I take refuge in it.* For this is truly the blessed Ratnasambhava, come to escort you on the perilous path of the intermediate state. It is the light-

ray hook of the blessed Ratnasambhava's compassion.
Long for it!

Do not be enticed by the pallid blue light of the human realm. This dull blue light is the alluring path formed by your habits, an accumulation of your own strong pride. If you become attached to it, you will fall back into the human realm. You will experience the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death, and almost no possibility to escape from the mire of the cycle of existence will exist.

This dull light blocks the path to liberation. Do not gaze at it! Relinquish your pride! Let go of your usual way of thinking! Do not be attracted by the pallid blue light! Do not cling to it! Long for the bright yellow light, golden and dazzling. Focus intensely on the blessed Ratnasambhava, and make the following invocation:

Alas! While I wander in the cycle of existence impelled by fierce pride,

May the blessed Ratnasambhava guide me

On the path of the radiant light of the wisdom of equality.

May the supreme consort Māmaki, following behind, sustain me.

Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passages of the intermediate state,

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.

By making this invocation with fervent devotion, you will dissolve into rainbow light in the heart of blessed Ratnasambhava, and you will attain enlightenment in the dimension of perfect enjoyment, in the pure southern realm called Glorious.

Fourth Day

There is no doubt that if the deceased has understood this introduction, he or she will attain liberation, however weak their capabilities may be. Yet even though having been given this introduction many times, some whose good fortune has been exhausted by having perpetrated many negative actions, or by not having maintained their spiritual commitments, will even

now not be receptive to this introduction. These individuals, convulsed by attachment and the vestiges of negative actions, will have fled in fear from the sound and the light. Thus, on the fourth day, the blessed Amitābha's assembly of deities will come to meet them and, at the same time, the dimly lit path leading to the realm of the hungry ghosts, generated by attachment and miserliness, will appear.⁵⁷

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her with these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the fourth day, the fire element manifests in utter purity as red light. At that time, from the red western pure realm called Blissful Sukhāvatī, blessed Amitābha, his body red in color, will appear before you, seated on a peacock throne with a lotus flower in his right hand and embraced by his supreme consort, Pāndaravāsinī. They are accompanied by two male bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, and two female bodhisattvas, Gītā and Ālokā. Thus, the forms of six enlightened beings⁵⁸ will shine before you within an expanse of rainbow light.

A crimson light, symbol of the wisdom of discernment, the basic purity of the aggregate of perception, adorned with greater and smaller spheres of rainbow light, radiant and clear, brilliant and scintillating, will issue from the hearts of Amitābha and his consort, shining piercingly toward your heart, so bright that your eyes cannot endure it. Do not be afraid of it! Together with this light of wisdom, a pallid yellow light, indicative of the realm of the hungry ghosts, will also arise, glimmering before your heart. Do not succumb to its attraction! Relinquish attachment and clinging to it! At that point, swayed by fierce craving, you may want to flee in terror from the bright crimson light and instead be drawn to the dull yellow light of the hungry ghost realm and feel attachment for it.

At that moment, be fearless. Recognize the crimson light, brilliant and dazzling, radiant and clear, as wisdom. Let your pure awareness relax within that light, in a state of nonaction. Again, have faith in it! Yearn for it! If you

recognize this light as the natural luminosity of your own pure awareness, even though you may not feel longing for it and have not recited the invocation, all the forms of the deities and light rays will merge inseparably within you, and you will become enlightened.

If you are unable to recognize the light in this way, then pray with devotion, thinking: *This is the light ray of the blessed Amitābha's compassion. I take refuge in it.* For this is truly the light-ray hook of the blessed Amitābha and his consort come to accompany you on the perilous path of the intermediate state. It is the light ray of blessed Amitābha, the hook of his compassion. Long for it! Do not flee from it! Even if you turn away, this light will accompany you inseparably. Do not be afraid of it.

Do not be enticed by the pallid yellow light of the hungry ghosts! This is the alluring path formed by your habits, an accumulation of your overwhelming desires. If you become attached to it, you will fall into the realm of the hungry ghosts and experience unbearable hunger and thirst.

This dull light blocks the path of liberation. Do not be attracted by it! Relinquish your attachment! Do not cling to it! Long for the crimson light, radiant and dazzling. Focus intensely on the blessed Amitābha and his consort, and pronounce the following invocation:

Alas! While I wander in the cycle of existence impelled by strong attachment,

May the blessed Amitābha guide me

On the path of the radiant light of the wisdom of discernment.

May the supreme consort Pāṇḍaravāsinī, following behind, sustain me.

Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passages of the intermediate state,

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment

By making this invocation with fervent devotion, you will dissolve into rainbow light in the heart of blessed Amitābha, and you will attain enlightenment in the

dimension of perfect enjoyment, in the pure southern realm called Blissful.

Fifth Day

Although it is impossible not to achieve liberation if this introduction is understood, nonetheless there will be those unable to renounce their habitual tendencies, even after having received it, due to long-established conditioning. Swayed by envy and negative past actions, they will be terrified by the sound and light. Thus, failing to be caught by the light-ray hook of compassion, they stray downward into the fifth day of the intermediate state. Thus, on the fifth day, the blessed Amoghasiddhi's assembly of deities, resplendent with the rays of compassion, will come to accompany them, and at the same time, the dimly lit path leading to the realm of the demigods, created by the emotion of envy, will appear.

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her with these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the fifth day, the air element manifests in utter purity as green light. At that time, from the pure green northern realm called Perfect and Complete Enlightened Activities or Karmaprasiddhi, blessed Amoghasiddhi, his body green in color, will appear before you with his retinue, seated on a *civamcivaka* bird throne,⁵⁹ holding a double vajra in his right hand and embraced by his supreme consort, Samayatārā. They are surrounded by two male bodhisattvas, Vajrapāṇi and Nīvāraṇaviśkambhin, and two female bodhisattvas, Gandhā and Nartī. Thus, the forms of six enlightened beings⁶⁰ will shine before you within an expanse of rainbow light.

A green light, symbol of action-accomplishing wisdom, the basic purity of the aggregate of volitions, green and scintillating, radiant and clear, brilliant and fearsome, adorned by greater and smaller spheres of rainbow light, will issue from the hearts of Amoghasiddhi and his consort, shining piercingly toward your heart, so bright that your eyes cannot endure it. Do not fear it! This is the

natural expressive energy of your own pure awareness. Thus, rest in the state of great equanimity beyond action, free of love, hate, and emotions stirred by desire for nearness or distance.

Together with the light of wisdom, a pallid red light, indicative of the realm of the demigods and created by envy, will also rise before you. Consider this dull light with equanimity, without attachment or aversion. Even if your mental capacity is weak, do not succumb to its attraction. At that time, swayed by deep envy, you may want to flee in terror from the brilliant and scintillating green light and instead feel drawn to the pallid red light of the demigod realm and develop attachment to it.

In that moment, be fearless. Recognize the green light, brilliant and scintillating, radiant and clear, as wisdom. Let your pure awareness relax within that light, in a state of nonaction. Pray with devotion, thinking: *This is the light ray of the blessed Amoghasiddhi's compassion. I take refuge in it.* This is truly the light-ray hook of the blessed Amoghasiddhi's compassion, known as action-accomplishing wisdom. Long for it! Do not flee from it! Even if you turn away, this light will accompany you inseparably. Do not be afraid of it!

Do not be enticed by the dim red light of the demigods. This is the alluring path formed by your past actions, accumulated by your deep envy. If you become attached to it, you will fall into the realm of the demigods and experience the unbearable suffering of strife and combat.

This dull light blocks your path to liberation. Do not be attached to it! Renounce your clinging! Long for the green light, radiant and dazzling. Focus intensely on the blessed Amoghasiddhi and his consort, and pronounce the following invocation:

Alas! While I wander in the cycle of existence impelled by deep envy,

May the blessed Amoghasiddhi guide me

On the path of the radiant light of action-accomplishing wisdom.

May the supreme consort Samayatārā, following behind, sustain

me.

Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passages of the intermediate state,

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.

By making this invocation with fervent devotion, you will dissolve in rainbow light in the heart of blessed Amoghasiddhi in union with his consort, and you will attain enlightenment in the dimension of perfect enjoyment, in the pure realm of the north called Perfect and Complete Enlightened Activities.

If you give the introduction many times in this way, however feeble the positive propensities created by the past actions of the deceased, he or she will attain recognition at one stage or another. As recognition can occur in any phase, it is impossible that the deceased not achieve liberation.

Sixth Day

However, as a result of long association and deeply rooted habits of thought and little familiarity with pure vision and wisdom, even after frequent experience of these introductions, there will be those who are led astray by negative habitual tendencies. Thus, failing to be caught by the light-ray hook of compassion, they become bewildered and terrified by the lights and rays, and they continue to stray downward.

Now on the sixth day, the male and female deities of the five enlightened families together with their retinues will appear simultaneously, and at the same moment the six dim lights representing the beings of the six realms of existence will also manifest.

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her with these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. Until yesterday the visions of the five enlightened families appeared before you individually. Even though the introduction was given, owing to your old habits of

thought, you grew bewildered and terrified. Hence you have remained here in the intermediate state until now. If before you had recognized the natural luminosity of even one of the wisdoms of the five enlightened families as your own manifestation, you would have dissolved into rainbow light in the heart of one of the deities of the five illumined families and attained enlightenment in the dimension of perfect enjoyment. Since you have been unable to recognize the wisdom lights as your own manifestation, you have wandered here. Now listen without distraction. The vision of the entire assembly of deities of the five enlightened families together with the vision called the union of the four wisdoms will now come to meet you. Recognize them.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, colored lights, four in number, the pure states of the four elements, will now appear before you, and simultaneously the buddha Vairocana and his consort will manifest, as before, from the central pure realm called the Pervading Sphere. At the same time, the buddha Vajrasattva and his consort, accompanied by their retinue, will manifest from the eastern pure realm called Perfect Joy. The buddha Ratnasambhava and his consort, accompanied by their retinue, will manifest from the southern pure realm called Glorious. The buddha Amitābha and his consort, accompanied by their retinue, will manifest from the western pure realm called Blissful Lotus Mound. The buddha Amoghasiddhi and his consort, accompanied by their retinue, will manifest from the northern pure realm called Perfect and Complete Enlightened Activities.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, surrounding these male and female deities of the five enlightened families, the wrathful male gatekeepers, Trailokyavijaya, Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, and Amṛtakunḍalīn will also appear, together with the wrathful female gatekeepers, Aṅkuśā, Pāśā, Sphotā, and Ghanṭā. Moreover, the six nirmāṇakāya sages⁶¹ who are the blessed ones will also appear before you: Indraśakra, the sage of the gods; Vemacitra, the sage of the demigods; Śākyamuni, the sage of human beings; Sthirasimha, the sage of animals; Jvālamukha, the sage of

the hungry ghosts; and Dharmarāja, the sage of hell beings. Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī, Universal Goodness, the primordial couple, whose indivisible union is the progenitor of all enlightened beings, will also manifest before you. These forty-two deities of the dimension of perfect enjoyment will issue from your own heart and manifest before you. Recognize them! They have arisen within your own pure vision.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, these pure realms are not outside you. They are the five facets of your own heart, its four directions and its center. Emanating from within your own heart, they now appear before you. These forms of enlightened beings have not come from outside you. They are spontaneously present, primordially arisen as the natural expression of the energy of your own pure awareness. Recognize them as such!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, these buddha forms are neither large nor small; they are perfectly proportioned and characterized by their respective ornaments, colors, postures, thrones, and hand gestures. These beings are arrayed in five distinct clusters, each with a central couple of male and female deities, with each cluster surrounded by a nimbus of five-colored lights. All male bodhisattvas of the five enlightened families who accompany the male buddhas, and all female bodhisattvas of the five enlightened families who accompany the female buddhas, as well as the entire maṇḍala, will dawn before you, simultaneously and perfectly. Recognize them! They are your own meditation deities.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, now from the hearts of the male and female buddhas of the five enlightened families, the light rays of the four wisdoms united indivisibly, extremely fine and clearly defined like a spiderweb, appear before your heart, shimmering like entwined sunbeams.

First, streams of radiant white light,⁶² brilliant and awe-inspiring, symbol of the wisdom of the expanse of reality, issue from the heart of Vairocana, and touch your heart. Within⁶³ these light rays, a luminous white sphere resembling a mirror facing downward will appear, very

clear, extremely radiant, bright and dazzling, adorned with five distinct spheres of light, each in turn adorned by other spheres, bigger and smaller, forming a display with neither center nor perimeter.

Second, streams of radiant blue light, symbol of mirrorlike wisdom, issue from the heart of Vajrasattva. Within these light rays, like a turquoise bowl facing downward, a radiant blue sphere will appear, adorned by bigger and smaller spheres.

Third, streams of radiant yellow light, symbol of the wisdom of equality, issue from the heart of Ratnasambhava. Within these light rays, like a gold cup facing downward, a radiant yellow sphere will appear, adorned by bigger and smaller spheres.

Fourth, streams of radiant red light, symbol of the wisdom of discernment, issue from the heart of Amitābha. Within these light rays, like a coral cup facing downward, a radiant crimson sphere will appear, extremely luminous and dazzling, resplendent with the glow of wisdom. This sphere too will be adorned by five distinct spheres of light of similar nature, each in turn adorned by bigger and smaller spheres, forming a display with neither center nor perimeter.

All of these lights will appear before you and touch your heart.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, these streams of light and spheres arise as the natural expression of the energy of your own state of pure awareness. They do not come from anywhere else. Do not be attached to them! Do not be afraid of them! Relax in the nonconceptual state,⁶⁴ and abiding there, you and all forms of the enlightened beings and light rays that have appeared will coalesce indissolubly, and you will attain enlightenment.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the green light, symbol of action-accomplishing wisdom, does not manifest now because the natural expression of energy, the wisdom of your own pure awareness, is not yet perfected.⁶⁵

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, these streams of light and spheres you behold are the vision called the union of the four wisdoms, also known as the empty space of

Vajrasattva.⁶⁶ At this time, remember the oral instructions your teacher previously introduced to you. If you recall that introduction, you will feel at home with the visions that have already manifested, and you will without doubt recognize them, just as instant recognition arises when a mother and son meet, or when old acquaintances see each other. You will perceive these lights and spheres as your own natural manifestations. Gaining confidence in this way in the immutable path of pure reality and experiencing continuous contemplation, you will dissolve into the dimension of total self-perfected pure awareness, and irreversibly attain enlightenment in the dimension of perfect enjoyment.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, together with the radiant lights of wisdom, the six dull lights of the six realms that are impure and deceptive visions will also arise simultaneously. Thus, the pallid white light of the gods, the pallid red light of the demigods, the pallid blue light of human beings, the pallid green light of animals, the pallid yellow light of the hungry ghosts, and the murky light of the hell beings will appear alongside the luminous pure wisdoms. At that time, do not fixate on or become drawn to any of these lights! Relax in a conceptless state. If you are afraid of the pure lights of wisdom and become attached to the impure lights of the cycle of existence with its six realms, you will incarnate as a being of one of the six classes and feel anguish, unable to escape from the vast ocean of suffering of the cycle of existence.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you lack the introduction which is the oral instruction of a spiritual teacher, you will be terrified and overpowered by the forms of the enlightened beings and by the pure lights of wisdom just described, and you will be drawn to the impure lights of the cycle of existence. Do not let this happen! Have faith in the light of wisdom, brilliant and dazzling, and think, *The light rays of wisdom, which are the compassion of those gone to bliss, the blessed ones of the five enlightened families, have come to seize me with their compassion. I take refuge in them.*

Do not be enticed by the illusory lights of the six realms

of existence. Do not cling to them! Focus intensely on the male and female buddhas of the five enlightened families, and repeat the following invocation:

Alas! While I wander in the cycle of existence impelled by the five virulent poisons,

*May the blessed ones of the five enlightened families guide me
On the path of the radiant light of the union of the four wisdoms,
and*

*May the five supreme female buddhas, the purity of the expanse
of reality,*

Following behind, sustain me.

*Thus surrounded, protected from the dimly lit paths of the six
impure realms of existence,*

*May I be freed from the frightening passages of the intermediate
state, and*

May I be accompanied to the five supreme pure realms.

By making this invocation, those of superior capacity will recognize the radiance of wisdom as their own manifestation and thereby attain enlightenment, dissolving indivisibly into these lights. Those of middling ability will gain this recognition through their heartfelt devotion, and thereby attain liberation. Even those of inferior capacity can, with the strength of pure aspiration, close the womb entrances through which beings are born in the six realms. Thus, if they realize the nature of the union of the four wisdoms, all those individuals will attain enlightenment through the empty space of Vajrasattva. Introduced in such a clear and precise way to the assembly of the peaceful deities, the majority will recognize their state, and many will attain liberation.

However, the lowest of individuals in the human world, such as those who lack any affinity for the sacred spiritual teachings, those who have broken their vows, and so on, will continue confused, a result of their past actions. In spite of having received the introduction, failing to recognize that their visions are their own manifestation, they will continue to stray downward.

Seventh Day

Thus on the seventh day the assembly of divine awareness holders⁶⁷ manifests from the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers⁶⁸ and comes to meet the deceased. Simultaneously, the dimly lit path leading to the animal realm, created by a liking for ignorance, appears.

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her with these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the seventh day, a light of five colors, denoting the purity of your habitual tendencies in the expanse of reality, will arise before you. At that time, the assembly of divine awareness holders will manifest from the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers and come to meet you.

At the center of this *maṇḍala*, permeated by rainbow light, the unsurpassed *vidyādhara* known as the awareness holder of maturation, Padmanarteśvara, manifests instantly, his body radiant in the splendor of the five lights. He is embraced by his consort, a red *dākinī*⁶⁹ who dances with a blood-filled skull cup and a curved knife raised toward the sky.

In the east of the *maṇḍala*, the *vidyādhara* known as the awareness holder who abides on the levels of realization manifests instantly, his body white in color, his face radiant and smiling. He is embraced by his consort, a white *dākinī* who dances with a blood-filled skull cup and a curved knife raised toward the sky.

In the south of the *maṇḍala*, the *vidyādhara* known as the awareness holder with mastery over the life span manifests instantly, his body yellow in color and adorned with the eighty exquisite minor marks.⁷⁰ He is embraced by his consort, a yellow *dākinī* who dances with a blood-filled skull cup and a curved knife raised toward the sky.

In the west of the *maṇḍala*, the *vidyādhara* known as the awareness holder of the Great Symbol manifests instantly, his body red in color and his face radiant and smiling. He is embraced by his consort, a red *dākinī* who dances with a blood-filled skull cup and a curved knife raised toward the

sky.

In the north of the maṇḍala, the *vidyādhara* known as the awareness holder of self-perfectedness manifests instantly, his body green in color, his face both smiling and wrathful. He is embraced by his consort, a green ḍākinī who dances with a blood-filled skull cup and a curved knife raised toward the sky.

Surrounding these awareness holders, innumerable assemblies of ḍākinīs gather: the ḍākinīs of the eight charnel grounds, the ḍākinīs of the four enlightened families, the ḍākinīs of the three abodes, the ḍākinīs of the ten directions, the ḍākinīs of the twenty-four sacred places,⁷¹ spiritual heroes and heroines, messengers,⁷² and protectors of the sacred teaching. All of them are adorned with the six kinds of bone ornaments;⁷³ play drums, thighbone trumpets, and skull drums;⁷⁴ flourish banners made of the skin of released beings;⁷⁵ and have canopies and streamers made of human skin. This entire maṇḍala is permeated by a cloud of incense arising from burning human flesh and reverberates with countless diverse musical instruments, the sound pervading all world systems, causing them to shudder, quiver, and shake. The din of the instruments will threaten to split your head in two. Performing a dance, the awareness holders and their retinues come to greet those who have kept their commitments and to chasten those who have broken them.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, a five-colored light indicating the purity of your habitual tendencies in the expanse of reality and innate wisdom and resembling entwined colored threads of light, vibrating, shimmering, scintillating, radiant, brilliant, dazzling, and awe-inspiring, issues from the hearts of the five principal awareness holders and shines piercingly toward your heart, so bright that your eyes cannot endure it.

At that moment, simultaneously with the light of wisdom, a pallid green light, indicative of the animal realm, will appear and touch your heart. At this time, misled by your past conditioning, you will be frightened by the five-colored light and wish to flee from it. Instead you will be drawn to the dull light of the animal realm. Do not

be intimidated now by the blinding five-colored light! Do not be terrified! Recognize this radiant light to be wisdom! Within the five-colored light, the natural sound of the sacred teaching will resound like a thousand thunderclaps crashing simultaneously. They will strike with a violent sound, an ear-splitting clamor resembling vehement war cries, and pound with the roar of fierce wrathful mantras. Do not be afraid! Do not flee! Recognize these sounds and lights to be the energy of your own pure awareness, manifesting naturally. Do not be drawn to the pallid green light of the animal realm. Do not cling to it! If you become attached to it, you will fall into the gloomy animal realm and experience the unlimited sufferings of stupidity and slavery, with no possibility of escape. Therefore, do not be lured by the dull green light! Trust the five-colored light, radiant and dazzling!

Focus intensely on the assembly of the divine spiritual teachers, the awareness holders who are the blessed ones, thinking:

Awareness holders, together with your attendants, the dakinis⁷⁶ and dakinis, you have come to accompany me to the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers. Thus I beseech you, have pity on sentient beings like me who have failed to accumulate merits and wisdom, and particularly on those like me who have failed to be rescued until now, even though we have received the compassionate care of the assembled deities of the five enlightened families who have gone to bliss throughout the three times! Today, no matter what, may you, the assembly of divine awareness holders, not allow me to fall further than I already have. Seize me with the hook of your compassion, and take me immediately to the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers.

Focus intensely on the assembly of awareness holders, and recite the following invocation:

*O, assembly of divine awareness holders, look after me
And lead me on the path with great love!
While I wander in samsara impelled by deep-rooted habitual tendencies,*

*May the assembly of awareness holders, the spiritual heroes,
guide me*

On the path of the radiant light of innate wisdom.

*May the supreme consorts, the dākinīs, following behind, sustain
me.*

*Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passages of the
intermediate state,*

May I be accompanied to the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers.

By making this invocation with fervent devotion, you will dissolve into rainbow light in the heart of the assembly of divine awareness holders, and thereafter, without doubt, be born in the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers.

All kinds of friends of the spiritual can gain recognition at this point, and will thereby attain liberation. It is certain that even those with a negative bent can attain liberation at this juncture.⁷⁷

This concludes the first part of the Great Liberation through Hearing, comprising the introduction to the clear light in the intermediate state of the moment of death and the introduction to the peaceful deities in the intermediate state of reality.

Iti! Samaya! gya gya gya!

The Vision of the Wrathful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality

Herein is contained An Elucidation of the Manner of Arising of the Intermediate State of the Wrathful Deities. The manner in which the intermediate state of the wrathful deities arises needs to be explained. In the intermediate state of the peaceful deities, seven successive crucial passages were described. The deceased received the introductions to these passages in sequence, and even though they may not gain recognition at one critical turning point, many gain it at another. Thus, those who have been liberated are numberless.

Although many have attained liberation in this way, sentient beings are countless. Their past evil deeds are very powerful. The vestiges of their negative actions are oppressive. Habitual tendencies are long-lived. The cycle of ignorance and confusion is

inexhaustible and unabated. Despite having received introduction in a precise way, many still stray downward, not having attained liberation.

At this point, after the encounter with the assembly of the peaceful deities and the assembly of the divine awareness holders and the dākinīs has happened, the blazing assembly of the fifty-eight wrathful *herukas*, who are a transformation of the previous peaceful deities, manifests. These deities are dissimilar in appearance from the peaceful deities. This is the intermediate state of the wrathful deities, and inevitably, since the deceased will be overwhelmed by fear, terror, and bewilderment, recognizing those deities as their own manifestation also becomes more difficult. With self-control lost, awareness disappears continuously. Nonetheless, if there is even slight recognition, liberation is readily achieved. Should you question why this should be so, it is because once the bewildering, terrifying, and fearful visions arise, awareness does not have the leisure to be distracted, and becomes totally focused.

At this time, if oral instructions such as those that follow have not been previously received or are not heard now, though your knowledge may have been as vast as the ocean, it will be of no benefit here. Even preceptors who have abided by monastic discipline and great teachers of dialectics can become confused on this occasion and, failing to gain recognition, continue to wander in cyclic existence. This is all the more true for ordinary people, who, fleeing in bewilderment, terror, and fear, fall into the abyss of the lower existences, where they suffer terribly. However, the least of yogins who has practiced the path of the Secret Mantra, upon seeing the assembly of herukas, will instantly recognize them as meditation deities as if meeting old acquaintances. Having faith in them, the yogin will dissolve indivisibly into the meditation deities and become enlightened.

The essential point is that those in this world who have meditated according to the textual description of these herukas and made offerings and praised them, or at least have seen their painted or sculpted images, will recognize the forms that appear in the intermediate state and attain liberation.

Furthermore, when preceptors who kept monastic discipline and teachers of dialectics die without having received these instructions, however much they upheld religious conduct, and

however learned they were in the exegesis of doctrines in the human world, no auspicious signs of major relics such as the *shariram*, other minor relics,⁷⁸ or rainbow lights will appear. Since they were unable to comprehend the path of the Secret Mantra while they were alive and denigrated the Secret Mantra, consequently failing to become familiar with its assemblage of deities, they do not recognize the deities when they appear in the intermediate state. Suddenly, beholding what they had never beheld, they become hostile and feel revulsion for what appears to them. As a result of that aversion, they will proceed to ever lower existences. This is why, on the death of advocates of monastic discipline and dialecticians who have neither taken to heart nor practiced the path of Secret Mantra, however excellent they may have otherwise been, signs such as major and minor relics and rainbows do not occur.

Practitioners on the path of Secret Mantra, even the least advanced, however coarse their behavior during life has been, however uncultured and unrefined they were, and however churlish and graceless their conduct, even if they had not been able to practice successfully the path of Secret Mantra, will attain liberation at this juncture, simply because they have not harbored mistaken views, are without doubts, and have faith in the Secret Mantra. Even if their conduct in the human world lacked grace, at least one sign, such as major or minor relics, forms of deities,⁷⁹ or rainbow light,⁸⁰ will occur at their death. The reason is because this Secret Mantra teaching of the Great Liberation through Hearing bestows an extraordinarily great blessing.

Yogins on the path of the Secret Mantra with middling or better capacity who have practiced the meditations of both the generation and perfection stages and have recited the heart mantras, and so on, do not wander this far downward into the intermediate state of reality. As soon as their respiration ceases, they will definitely be led to the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers by the awareness holders, *dakas*, and *ḍākinīs*. Indicating this, the following external signs will occur: the sky will become limpid; rainbows and lights will shine on the horizon; a rain of flowers will fall; the fragrance of incense will fill the air; the sound of music will emanate from the sky; and major and minor relics and forms of deities will manifest in the funeral pyre.

Therefore, for upholders of monastic discipline and teachers of

dialectics who did not receive the introduction, and for practitioners on the path of Secret Mantra who have allowed their commitments to degenerate, and for all ordinary people, this Great Liberation through Hearing is indispensable.

Those dedicated meditators of the Total Perfection and the Great Symbol will recognize the clear light that dawns during the intermediate state of the moment of death and will realize the reality dimension of enlightenment, the dharmakāya. Thus the reading of the Great Liberation through Hearing to these meditators is not needed.

In brief, if practitioners recognize the clear light during the intermediate state of the moment of death by hearing this teaching, they will attain the reality dimension of enlightenment, the dharmakāya. If they gain recognition during the intermediate state of reality when the visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities manifest, they will attain the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment, the sambhogakāya. If they gain recognition during the intermediate state of rebirth, they will attain the emanation dimension of enlightenment, the nirmāṇakāya. At the least they will be reborn in the higher existences, where, owing to the good influences of their past actions, they will again meet with and practice this sacred teaching.

This Great Liberation through Hearing is the teaching whereby liberation can be attained without meditation. It is the teaching whereby liberation can be won just by hearing it. It is the teaching whereby evildoers are led onto the secret path. It is the profound teaching whereby reality is clearly discerned. It is the profound teaching whereby perfect enlightenment is attained in an instant.⁸¹ Thus it is impossible for those who have been reached by this teaching to fall into lower existences. This Great Liberation through Hearing and the Liberation through Wearing⁸² should be read aloud together; combined, they are like a maṇḍala of gold embellished with turquoise.

Having heard the explanation of the Great Liberation through Hearing, the deceased should now be introduced to the way the intermediate state of the wrathful deities arises.

Eighth Day

Calling the deceased by name three times, say the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. Even though the intermediate state of the peaceful deities previously manifested to you, you did not recognize it, and so you have been compelled to wander until here. Now on the eighth day, the assembly of wrathful blood-drinking deities will appear to you. Recognize them, and do not be distracted.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the one called Great Glorious Buddha Heruka will now arise from within your own mind and appear vividly before you. Blazing in a mass of light, his body is blackish-brown in color, with three heads, six arms, and four legs planted apart in a firm stance. His right face is white, his left face is red, and his middle face is blackish-brown. His nine eyes stare in a terrifying wrathful gaze, his eyebrows quiver like lightning bolts, his fangs are bared and gleaming like copper, and he roars with laughter, emitting the sounds *a la la* and *ha ha*, and a loud piercing hiss, *shu-uu*. His blazing red-gold hair streams skyward. Sun and moon disks, black snakes, and dried skulls bedeck each of his heads, and a garland of black serpents and fresh skulls adorns his body. He has six hands: on the right side he holds a wheel in his uppermost hand, an ax in his middle hand, and a sword in his lowest; on the left side he holds a bell in his uppermost hand, a plow in his middle hand, and a skull in his lowest. His consort, Buddhakrodhishvari, embraces him, her right hand clasped around his neck as her left hand lifts a skull cup filled with blood to his lips. Amid booming palatal sounds of *thuk chom* and roars reverberating like thunder, the fire of wisdom blazes forth from the flaming imperishable pores of their bodies as they stand, one leg extended and the other bent, on a throne supported by *garudas*.

Do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not become bewildered! Recognize these deities to be the buddha form of your own pure awareness. They are your meditation deities, so do not be frightened. In reality, they are the

actual presence of the blessed Buddha Vairocana and his consort. Do not fear! Recognition and liberation will occur simultaneously!

If, by hearing these words, the deceased recognizes these wrathful deities to be his or her own meditation deities, he or she will dissolve inseparably into them, and thereby become enlightened in the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment.

Ninth Day

Should the deceased flee once again, struck by bewilderment and terror, and thereby fail to recognize the apparitions as their own manifestation, then, on the ninth day, the blood-drinking deities of the Vajra family will come to meet them.

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her in these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the ninth day, the one called the blessed Vajra Heruka of the Vajra family of blood-drinking deities now arises from the eastern direction of your brain and manifests vibrantly before you. His body is blackish-blue in color, with three heads, six arms, and four legs planted apart in a firm stance. His right face is white, his left face is red, and his middle face is blue. He has six hands: on the right side, he holds a vajra in his uppermost hand, a skull cup in his middle hand, and an ax in his lowest; on the left side, he holds a bell in his uppermost hand, a skull cup in his middle hand, and a plow in his lowest. His consort, Vajrakrodhishvari, embraces him, her right hand clasped around his neck as her left hand lifts a skull cup filled with blood to his lips.

Do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not become bewildered! Recognize these deities to be the enlightened form of your own pure awareness. They are your meditation deities, so do not be frightened. In reality, they are the actual presence of the blessed Vajrasattva and his consort. Do not fear! Have faith in them! Recognition and

liberation will occur simultaneously.

If, by hearing these words, the deceased recognizes these wrathful deities to be his or her own meditation deities, he or she will merge inseparably with them, and thereby become enlightened in the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment.

Tenth Day

Should those individuals gravely hindered by their past actions flee again in bewilderment and terror and thereby fail to recognize the apparitions as manifestations of themselves, then, on the tenth day, the blood-drinking deities of the Ratna family will come to meet them.

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her in these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the tenth day, the one called Ratna Heruka of the Ratna family of blood-drinking deities will arise from the southern direction of your own brain and manifest before you. His body is blackish-yellow in color, with three faces, six arms, and four legs planted apart in a firm stance. His right face is white, his left face is red, and his middle face is a blazing blackish-yellow. He has six hands: on the right side he holds a jewel in the upper hand, a *khatvāṅga* in the middle hand, and a mace in the lowest; on the left side he holds a bell in the upper hand, a skull cup in the middle hand, and a trident in the lowest. His consort, Ratnakrodhishvari, embraces him, her right hand clasped around his neck as her left hand lifts a skull cup filled with blood to his lips. Do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not become bewildered! Recognize these deities to be the enlightened form of your own pure awareness. They are your meditation deities, so do not be frightened. In reality, they are the actual presence of the blessed Ratnasambhava and his consort. Do not fear! Have faith in them! Recognition and liberation will occur simultaneously.

If, by hearing these words, the deceased recognizes these wrathful deities to be his or her own meditation deities, he or she will dissolve inseparably into them, and thereby become enlightened in the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment.

Eleventh Day

However, even after receiving the introduction in this way, there are those deceased who, because of their negative habitual tendencies, flee in bewilderment and terror. Not perceiving these wrathful manifestations as their own meditation deities, they see them as Yama⁸³ and fail to recognize them. Then, on the eleventh day, the assembly of blood-drinking deities of the Padma family will come to meet them.

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her in these words:

O Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the eleventh day, the one called the blessed Padma Heruka, of the Padma family of blood-drinking deities, will arise from the western direction of your brain in union with his consort and manifest vividly before you. His body is blackish-red in color, with three faces, six arms, and four legs planted apart in a firm stance. His right face is white, his left face is blue, and his middle face is blackish-red. He has six hands: on the right side he holds a lotus in his uppermost hand, a khaṭvāṅga in his middle hand, and a club in his lowest; and on the left side he holds a bell in his uppermost hand, a skull cup filled with blood in his middle hand, and a small drum in his lowest. His consort, Padmakrodhishvari, embraces him, her right hand clasped around his neck, as her left hand lifts a skull cup filled with blood to his lips.

Do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not become bewildered! Recognize these deities as the enlightened form of your pure awareness. Look at them with joy. They are your own meditation deities, so do not be frightened. In reality, they are the actual presence of the blessed Amitābha and his consort. Thus, have faith in them! Recognition and liberation will occur simultaneously.

If, by hearing these words, the deceased recognizes these wrathful deities to be his or her own meditation deities, he or she will dissolve inseparably into them, and thereby become enlightened in the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment.

Twelfth Day

However, even after receiving the introduction in this way, some are so obstructed by their negative habitual tendencies that, bewildered and terrified, they again flee without recognizing these wrathful manifestations as their own meditation deities. Thus, on the twelfth day, the assembly of blood-drinking deities of the Karma family will come to meet the deceased, together with the *gaurī*, the *piśācī*, the female gatekeepers, and the *īśvarī*.⁸⁴

Since fear and terror still more extreme will arise if these deities are not recognized, again call the deceased by name and read the introduction aloud in these words:

O Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. On the twelfth day, the one called the blessed Karma Heruka of the Karma family will arise from the northern direction of your own brain and manifest before you. His body is blackish-green in color, with three faces, six arms, and four legs planted apart in a firm stance. His right face is white, his left face is blue, and his middle face is an awesome blackish-green. He has six hands: on the right side, he holds a sword in his uppermost hand, a *khaṭvāṅga* in his middle hand, and a cudgel in his lowest; on the left side, he holds a bell in his uppermost hand, a skull cup in his middle hand, and a plow in his lowest. His consort, Karmakrodheshvari, embraces him, her right hand clasped around his neck as her left hand lifts a skull cup filled with blood to his lips.

Do not be afraid! Do not be terrified! Do not become bewildered! Recognize these wrathful deities to be the enlightened form of your pure awareness. They are your own meditation deities, so do not be frightened. In reality, they are the actual presence of Buddha Amoghasiddhi and his consort. Have faith and reverence! Recognition and

liberation will occur simultaneously.

Upon hearing these words, if the deceased recognize the meditation deities, he or she will dissolve indivisibly into the deities, and thereby become enlightened in the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment.

If, on the basis of a spiritual teacher's previously given oral instructions, the deceased recognize these visions as the natural manifestation of the energy of their own pure awareness, they will attain liberation. As when one sees a stuffed lion but does not recognize it as such, the lion skin may cause confusion and fright, but once it is perceived as only a facade and is revealed for what it really is, fear disappears. Similarly, when the assembly of blood-drinking deities appears, filling all of space with their huge bodies and giant limbs, the dead will certainly become bewildered and terrified; but on hearing this introduction, they will immediately be able to recognize these wrathful deities as their own manifestations, or meditation deities.

When this recognition occurs, the two inner lights, the clear light you have previously meditated on, explained by a teacher and practiced during your lifetime, and the clear light that arises naturally now at the moment of death, come together like son and mother. The clear light will thus arise naturally in a self-liberating manner, face to face with itself, like meeting an old friend, and thereby the deceased will be spontaneously released in the dimension of their own natural radiant pure awareness.

If this introduction is not received, even virtuous people at this point may fail to recognize the situation they are in, and continue to wander in cyclic existence. Thereafter, the eight wrathful gaurī and the eight piśācī with different animal heads will arise from within the mind of the deceased and manifest before him or her.

Again calling the deceased by name, read the introduction aloud to him or her in these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. The eight gaurī now arise from within your own brain and manifest before you. Do not be afraid! From the eastern direction of your brain, the white Gaurī, holding a club in her right hand and a blood-filled skull cup in her left, will

appear before you. Do not be afraid! From the southern direction of your brain, the yellow Caurī will arise, shooting an arrow; from the west, the red Pramohā, waving the skin of a crocodile as a victory banner; from the north, the black Vetālī, holding a vajra and a blood-filled skull cup; from the southeast, the reddish-yellow Pukkasi, grasping entrails in her right hand and devouring them with her left; from the southwest, the blackish-green Ghasmarī, holding a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand, stirring it with a vajra in her right hand, and drinking the blood intimidatingly; from the northwest, the pale yellow Caṇḍālī, tearing apart the head and body of a corpse, holding the heart in her right hand and devouring the body with the left; and from the southeast, the blackish-blue Smaśānī, ripping the head from a body and devouring it. These eight gaurī, symbols of the eight consciousnesses,⁸⁵ the source of cyclic existence, will arise from within your own brain, and encircle the five male herukas and their consorts. Do not be afraid!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. The eight piśacī, symbols of the sense objects, emerge and manifest before you, encircling the gaurī: from the east, the blackish-brown lion-headed Siṁhamukhī, her two hands crossed on her breast, carrying a corpse in her mouth and shaking her mane; from the south, the red tiger-headed Vyāghrimukhī, her two arms crossed, staring downward with bulging eyes and snarling; from the west, the black fox-headed Śṛgālamukhī, holding a razor in her right hand and entrails in her left, devouring them and lapping the blood; from the north, the blackish-blue wolf-headed Shvānamukhī, tearing apart a corpse with her two hands and staring with bulging eyes; from the southeast, the whitish-yellow vulture-headed Grdhrāmukhī, a large human corpse over her shoulder and grasping a skeleton in her hands; from the southwest, the blackish-red *kangka* bird-headed⁸⁶ Kaṇkamukhī, a large corpse slung over her shoulders; from the northwest, the black crow-headed Kākamukhī, holding a skull in her left hand, a sword in her right, and eating a human heart and lungs; and from the northeast, the blackish-blue owl-headed Ulūkamukhī,

holding a vajra in her right hand, wielding a sword in her left, and eating flesh. These eight piśācī, symbol of the natural purity of the objects of the eight consciousnesses, rise from within your own brain, and manifest before you, surrounding the five male herukas and their consorts. Do not be afraid! Recognize all that appears as a manifestation of the natural energy of your own pure awareness arising spontaneously.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the four female gatekeepers also emerge from within your own brain and manifest before you. Recognize them! From the eastern direction of your brain arises the white horse-headed Aṅkuśā, a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand; from the south, the yellow sow-headed Pāśā, holding a noose; from the west, the red lion-headed Sphoṭā, holding an iron chain; and from the north, the green snake-headed Ghaṇṭā, holding a bell. These four female gatekeepers issue from your brain and manifest before you.⁸⁷ Recognize them, for they are your own meditation deities!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, encircling these thirty deities, who are the fierce herukas and their retinues, the twenty-eight īśvari emerge from within your own brain and manifest before you. They have various animal heads and hold different weapons. Do not be afraid! Recognize all that appears as a manifestation of the natural energy of your own pure awareness, arising spontaneously. Now at this critical point, remember the oral instructions of your spiritual teacher.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the six yoginīs of the east emerge from within your own brain and manifest before you: the blackish-brown yak-headed Manurākṣā, holding a vajra; the yellowish-red snake-headed Brahmāṇī, holding a lotus; the blackish-green leopard-headed Raudrī, holding a trident; the blue weasel-headed Vaiṣṇavī, holding a wheel; the red brown bear-headed Kaumārī, holding a pike; and the white black-bear-headed Indrāṇī, holding a noose of entrails. Do not be afraid!⁸⁸

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the six yoginīs of the south emerge from your own brain and manifest before you: from the south, the yellow bat-headed Vajrā, holding

a razor; the red crocodile-headed Śāntī, holding a vase; the red scorpion-headed Amṛta, holding a lotus; the white hawk-headed Saumī, holding a vajra; the blackish-green fox-headed Dandī, holding a cudgel; and the blackish-yellow tiger-headed Rākṣasī, holding a blood-filled skull cup in her hand. Do not be afraid!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the six yoginīs of the west emerge from within your own brain and manifest before you: the blackish-green vulture-headed Bhakṣasī, holding a club; the red horse-headed Ratī, holding a large human corpse; the white garuḍa-headed indomitable one Rudhiramadī, consort of Mahabala, carrying a club; the red dog-headed Ekacāriṇī Rākṣasī, wielding a vajra razor in her hand; the red hoopoe-headed Manohārikā, shooting an arrow from a bow; and the greenish-red deer-headed protectress of wealth Siddhikarī, consort of Vasurakshita, holding a vase in her hand. Do not be afraid!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the six yoginīs of the north emerge from within your own brain and manifest before you: the blue wolf-headed Vāyudevī, flourishing a banner with an insignia; the red wolf-headed Agnayī, wielding a searing firebrand; the black sow-headed Vārāhī, holding a noose of fangs; the red crow-headed Vajra Cāmundī, carrying a child's corpse; the blackish-green elephant-headed Bhujanā, brandishing a club and drinking blood from a skull; the blue snake-headed Varunāṇī, holding a noose of snakes in her hand. Do not be afraid!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen without distraction. The four yoginī gatekeepers emerge from within your own brain and manifest before you: from the east, the white cuckoo-headed Vajra Mahākālī, holding an iron hook; from the south, the yellow goat-headed Vajra Mahāchāgalā, holding a noose; from the west, the red lion-headed Vajra Mahākumbhakarṇī, holding an iron chain; and from the north, the blackish-green snake-headed Vajra Lambodarā, holding a bell in her hand. Also these yoginīs, who are the four female gatekeepers, emerge from your own brain and manifest before you. Do not be afraid! All twenty-eight iśvarī issue naturally from the energy of the spontaneously arising forms of the deities who are the

fierce herukas. Recognize them!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, through the energy of emptiness, the dharmakāya, the reality dimension of enlightenment, has manifested as the peaceful deities. Recognize this! Through the energy of clarity, the sambhogakāya dimension of perfect enjoyment of awakening has manifested as the wrathful deities. Recognize this!

At this time, when the fifty-eight herukas emerge from within your own brain and manifest before you, recognize all that appears as the natural luminosity of your own pure awareness. If you have this recognition, you will become immediately enlightened, inseparable from these herukas.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if even now you do not recognize these visions, fearing them and fleeing, you will experience further suffering. If recognition does not occur, you will see the wrathful herukas as the Lord of Death. Overwhelmed by fear, bewildered and terrorized at the sight of the wrathful deities, you will faint. The visions that are natural manifestations of your pure awareness will seem demonic, and you will continue to wander in cyclic existence. If you are not overcome with awe and terror, you can elude this continued wandering in cyclic existence.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the largest of the peaceful and wrathful deities will be as vast as the sky; the medium, the size of Mount Sumeru;⁸⁹ and even the smallest, the height of eighteen of our bodies, one above the other. Do not be terrified! All phenomenal existence is now manifesting as radiance and in the forms of deities. By recognizing all vision to be the natural luminosity of your own pure awareness, manifesting as these lights and divine forms, you will dissolve inseparably into them, and enlightenment will be yours.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, whatever fearsome and terrifying visions appear to you now, recognize them to be natural manifestations of your own pure awareness. Do not be afraid! Recognize these apparitions as the clear light that is the natural luminosity of your own pure awareness. If you recognize them as such, you will without doubt

become enlightened now. What is called perfect enlightenment will happen at this very moment. Keep this in mind!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you still do not recognize the visions and continue to be terrified, now all the peaceful deities will appear in the form of Mahakala, and all the wrathful deities will appear in the form of Yama. Thus, with your own visions transformed into demons, you will continue to wander in the cycle of existence.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you do not recognize the visions you are having now as natural manifestations of your own pure awareness, even though you may have been well-versed in all the sutras and tantras that make up the words of the enlightened ones, and even though you may have practiced these sacred teachings for an aeon, you will not attain enlightenment. But if you recognize the visions as your own manifestation, through the understanding of this single essential point and through the understanding of a single word, you will become enlightened.

If, upon death, you do not recognize at once the visions as your own manifestations, these visions will appear later during the intermediate state of reality in the form of Yama Dharmarāja. The largest figure of Yama Dharmarāja will be as vast as the sky; the medium figure, the size of Mount Sumeru, will occupy our entire world system. He will appear with his upper teeth biting his lower lip, glassy-eyed, his hair tied on the crown of the head, his belly distended, and his neck spindly, holding in his hand a wooden slate inscribed with the records of the past actions of the deceased. Howling “Smite!” and “Kill!” he swallows brains, severs heads, and plucks out internal organs. His form will seem to fill our entire world system.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, when such visions manifest, do not be afraid or terrified. Your body is a mental body, formed by habitual tendencies. Therefore, even if you are slain and chopped into pieces, you cannot die. In reality, you are the natural form of emptiness, so there is no need to be afraid. The forms of Yama

Dharmarāja also manifest from the natural radiance of your own pure awareness and have no material existence. Emptiness cannot be harmed by emptiness. Understand with certainty that other than manifesting from the natural energy of your own pure awareness, all these phenomena that appear externally—the peaceful and wrathful deities, the herukas, the deities with different animal heads, the rainbow lights, the terrifying forms of Yama, and so on—have no concrete existence. If you come to this certainty, all fear and terror will be naturally liberated. You will dissolve inseparably into the wrathful deities, and enlightenment will be attained.

If you recognize the wrathful deities in this way, feel intense devotion and think, *My meditation deities have come to meet me on the perilous path of the intermediate state. I take refuge in them.* Remember the Three Precious Jewels! Remember your meditation deity, whichever it is!

Call upon your meditation deity by name and make the following invocation: *O, precious meditation deity, I am here, wandering in the intermediate state. Come rescue me! Seize me with your compassion.*

Call to your spiritual teacher by name, and make the following invocation: *I am here, wandering in the intermediate state. Rescue me! Do not let your compassion abandon me.*

Invoke also the herukas and beseech them in the following words:

Alas! While I wander in the cycle of existence impelled by deep-rooted habitual tendencies,

May the assembly of peaceful and wrathful deities, the blessed ones, guide me

On the path of radiant light, where bewildering and terrifying visions vanish.

May the assembly of the wrathful female deities, Dhatvishvari and the others, following behind, sustain me.

Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passages of the intermediate state,

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.

*Now, when I wander alone, separated from my dearest friends,
And the overwhelming images of emptiness, my own
manifestations, arise,
May the buddhas reveal the power of their compassion
And may the fears of the bewildering and frightening passages of
the intermediate state be reversed.
When the five radiant lights of wisdom dawn,
May I recognize them as my own nature, without fear or terror,
And, as the forms of the peaceful and wrathful deities manifest,
May I, fearless and confident, recognize the nature of the
intermediate state.
When I suffer as a result of my negative past actions
May the meditation deity allay those afflictions,
And as the natural sound of reality echoes like a thousand
thunderclaps,
May all sounds be heard as the resonance of the Six Syllables.⁹⁰
When I am driven forward by my past actions, without any
refuge,
May the Great Compassionate One protect me,
And as I experience the suffering of habitual behavior and past
actions,
May the contemplation of the clear light and bliss arise in me
spontaneously.
May the energies of the five elements not manifest as enemies,
And may I see them as the pure realms of the five enlightened
families.*

Make this invocation with intense devotion. It is very important because as all fear and terror vanish, you will certainly become enlightened in the dimension of perfect enjoyment. So, do not be distracted!

The above introduction should be read aloud three or seven times. Even if the deeds of the deceased have been wicked and the positive propensities of past actions poor, it is impossible for the deceased not to become liberated if there is recognition of the

natural state. If recognition does not occur, even though these instructions have been given many times, the deceased will inevitably wander into the intermediate state of rebirth, the third intermediate state. The introduction to that phase is presented in detail below.

CONCLUSION OF THE INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF THE MOMENT OF DEATH AND THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF REALITY

Since many people experience confusion at the moment of death, knowledge of the Great Liberation through Hearing is crucial, whatever your degree of familiarity with meditative practice may be. For those with considerable meditative experience, recognition of the nature of reality can arise instantly, as soon as pure awareness separates from the body. Those who have been introduced directly to the state of pure awareness in their lifetime, and those who have had firsthand experience of it, will have the greatest potential for recognition of the clear light when it manifests during the intermediate state of the moment of death. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate such experiences during your lifetime. Moreover, those who, during their lives, have developed the deity meditation according to the generation and perfection stages on the path of the Secret Mantra will have the greatest potential for recognition during the intermediate state of reality, when the visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities manifest.

Since the above is true, it is extremely important to train the mind in the Great Liberation through Hearing while you are alive. Keep it in mind. Read it aloud. Understand it thoroughly. Take it totally to heart. Read it aloud three times a day without fail. Clearly impress its words and meanings on your mind, so that even if you were to be pursued by a hundred assassins, you would not forget its words and meanings.

This teaching is called the Great Liberation through Hearing because even those who have committed the five inexpiable crimes⁹¹ will certainly attain liberation on hearing the recitation of its words. Therefore, read it aloud in public places. The text should be circulated. Since awareness becomes nine times clearer during the intermediate state, even if this teaching is heard only once and even if its meaning is not comprehended, at the moment

of death it will be remembered without a single word forgotten. For this reason, it should be read aloud to everyone during their lifetime. Read it aloud next to the pillow of those who are sick, next to the bodies of the dead. It should be spread near and far.⁹²

To meet this teaching is a great fortune. Only those who have accumulated merits and wisdom and have purified their obscurations can meet it easily. For others it is difficult to encounter. Once heard, liberation can be attained simply by avoiding erroneous views.⁹³ Thus, cherish it greatly. It is the essence of all sacred teachings.

This completes the Introduction to the Intermediate State of the Moment of Death and the Introduction to Recognizing the Intermediate State of Reality, sections of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, the teaching on the intermediate states that liberates simply by being heard or seen.

Colophon

This hidden teaching was discovered by the consummate master Karma Lingpa, the eldest son of the consummate master Nyida Sangye,⁹⁴ at Gampodar, a mountain that resembles a dancing deity,⁹⁵ located near the Yangtze River.

INTRODUCTION TO THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF REBIRTH

I bow with veneration before the spiritual teachers and the assembly of deities.

May they inspire liberation in the intermediate state.

The intermediate state of reality explained in the Great Liberation through Hearing has already been presented. What follows now is known as the introduction to the intermediate state of rebirth.

Introduction to the Mental Body

With the exception of people who are greatly experienced in the practice of the sacred teaching and those who have excellent propensities from past actions, it is difficult for others,

particularly those who have committed many negative actions and those who lack familiarity with meditative experiences, to gain recognition of their essential nature at this point. Even if they have received the explanation of the intermediate state of reality many times, fear and terror or the influence of their negative actions in previous lives can prevent recognition. Thus from the tenth day onward, these individuals should again be reminded of this state with the instructions that follow.

As before, offerings should be made to the Three Precious Jewels, and the Invocation That Calls to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help should be recited. Then, having called the deceased by name, give the introduction in the following words, three or up to seven times:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen carefully and keep this in mind! Hell beings, gods, and those with the body of the intermediate state are born in a miraculous manner.⁹⁶ When the visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities manifested before you in the intermediate state of reality, you did not recognize them as your own nature. Then, overwhelmed by terror, you fainted. Four and a half days later, on reawakening, your consciousness will have become clearer than before, and a body resembling your former one will have appeared. This body is described in the tantras:⁹⁷

Having the bodily form of your past and arising existences,
The mental body is complete with all sense faculties and the
power of unimpeded movement.

Endowed with miraculous capacities stemming from past
actions,

It is visible to those analogous in kind and through pure
clairvoyance.

Here, “past and arising” means that the body you have now, which is a result of the vestiges of your prior habitual tendencies, will resemble a body of flesh and blood, but like the bodies of the beings of the auspicious aeon,⁹⁸ it will also be luminous and possess some of the major and minor marks.⁹⁹ Since this vision is an apparition of a

mental body, it is called “the mental body that is a vision in the intermediate state.” At this time, if you are to be born as a god, you will have visions of the god realm. Depending on which of the realms you are to be born into—that of the demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, or hell beings—you will have the vision of that particular realm. Accordingly, “past” means that for three and a half days you will have the impression of possessing a material body and habitual tendencies like those of your previous existence. “Arising” means that after three and a half days the vision of the realm into which you are to be born will arise, hence the expression *past and arising*.

Whatever realm appears in vision at this time, do not be attracted to it! Do not become attached to it! Do not cleave to it! If you desire it and attach yourself to it, you will continue to wander in the six realms of existence and suffer. Until yesterday, the intermediate state of reality arose within you, but you did not recognize it, and so you have been compelled to wander here. Now, if you are able to sustain without distraction the recognition of your own essential nature, previously introduced to you by your teacher, and relax beyond grasping and beyond activity directly in the unfaltering naked awareness of radiance and emptiness, you will cease gravitating toward the womb entrances and you will gain liberation. If you are not able to recognize your essential nature, visualize your meditation deity, whatever it may be, or your spiritual teacher, on the crown of your head, and feel intense devotion. This is of great importance. Do not be distracted now!

If the deceased recognizes this essential nature, he or she will attain liberation and avoid wandering any further within the six realms of existence. Recognition is difficult to achieve for some owing to past negative actions, and therefore you should repeat the introduction in the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen carefully once more.
“Complete with all sense faculties and the power of

unimpeded movement” means that even though you may have been blind, deaf, crippled, or had another impairment while you were alive, now, in the intermediate state, your eyes see shapes, your ears hear sounds, and so on, and all your sense faculties are perfect, unclouded, and complete. Hence the previous verses say “complete with all sense faculties.” Recognize this perfect sensory capacity as a sign that you have died and are wandering in the intermediate state. Remember this oral instruction.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, “unimpeded” means the body you have now is a mental body. Your pure awareness is separated from bodily support. Therefore, yours is not a material body. For this reason, you now have the power to move without obstruction, passing through Mount Sumeru, through houses, earth, stones, rocks, and mountains as if they were vapor. Other than your mother’s womb and the indestructible seat,¹⁰⁰ you can pass back and forth even through Mount Sumeru. Remember the instructions of your spiritual teacher, for this capacity is a sign that you are wandering in the intermediate state of rebirth. Recognize this, and invoke Mahakarunika, the Lord of Great Compassion!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the phrase “endowed with miraculous capacities stemming from past actions”¹⁰¹ does not mean you possess enlightened attributes or supernatural powers as a result of meditative absorption, but that you have a miraculous power arising from and according to your past actions. Thus you will have the ability to circle Mount Sumeru and the four continents in an instant. In the time it takes to flex your arm, you can instantly reach anywhere you wish, just by thinking of that place. Do not be enthralled by these various incidental miraculous powers. Do not be attached to them! Whatever thing you may recall, there is not one that you cannot make manifest. You have the ability now to have appear whatever you wish without hindrance. Recognize this as a sign that you are in the intermediate state, and invoke your spiritual teacher.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, the phrase “visible to those analogous in kind” means that in the intermediate

state those with the same kind of birth can see one another. Thus, in the case of those who are to be born as gods, for instance, these future gods will be able to see one another. Likewise, those who are the same as a particular being of one of the six classes will be able to see one another. Do not become attached to this vision! Meditate on Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One!

The words “visible through pure clairvoyance” do not refer to the clairvoyance of the gods, and so on, which is an outcome of deserving qualities, but rather to the extremely pure clairvoyance with which those who have perfect meditative concentration perceive hidden phenomena. However, this clairvoyance cannot always perceive beings of the intermediate state. When you wish to see beings similar in kind in the intermediate state, you will perceive them. When you are not intent on doing so, they will not be perceived. This clairvoyance disappears as soon as your focused attention is distracted.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, with the mental body, you will once again see your native land and your kindred, as if in a dream. But even though you speak to your relatives, they will not respond. You will see your family and relatives crying, and realize: “I am dead. What shall I do now?” Thinking this, you will be overcome by intense suffering; you will feel like a fish thrashing on burning sand. Your suffering on realizing you are dead is of no help to you now. If you have a spiritual teacher, invoke your spiritual teacher. Invoke the meditation deity, Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One. The attachment you feel for your family is of no help to you now. Do not be attached! Pray to Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, and you will have no suffering, bewilderment, or fear.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, your awareness, without its physical support, is buffeted by the currents of the vital energy of past actions. Helpless, flung over the horse of inner breath, your awareness careens directionless, hither and yon, like a feather on the wind. To the relatives who are crying, you call out, “I am here. Do not weep.” But they cannot hear you. Anew you realize, “I am dead,” and

experience deep anguish. Do not abandon yourself to this despair.

A gray haze like an autumn twilight with neither day nor night will ceaselessly envelop you. The intermediate state between death and birth can last for one week, or two, three, four, five, six, or seven weeks: thus it can also last for forty-nine days. The scriptures say that suffering in the intermediate state of rebirth generally lasts twenty-one days. However, since the duration of this intermediate state depends on the past actions of the deceased, the number of days cannot be quantified.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, at this time the violent turbulence of the hurricane of your past actions will swirl behind you, hurtling you forward. Do not be afraid! This is your own illusory vision. Ahead, a terrifying, deep, and intolerable darkness awaits you, reverberating with howls of “Smite!” and “Kill!” Do not be afraid of these visions. Those who are malevolent will see manifest a drove of carnivorous monsters,¹⁰² enforcers of the relentless law of cause and effect, wielding an array of weapons and shouting bloodthirsty cries of “Kill!” and “Smite!” You will believe you are being pursued by terrifying ferocious beasts and hunted down by mobs. You will toil through blizzards, through sheets of rain, through fierce tempests, through darkness. You will hear the sound of mountains foundering, of lakes inundating, of fires raging, of mighty winds rising.

Terrified, you will flee wherever you can, but your way will be blocked by three dreadful precipices, one white, one red, and one black, and you will be possessed by the fear of stumbling over the edge.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, these are not true precipices. They are anger, attachment, and ignorance, respectively. Know these visions to be apparitions in the intermediate state of rebirth, and call Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, by name, and pray:

*O, Mahakarunika, Lord of Great Compassion, Spiritual Teacher, and Three Precious Jewels,
Keep me, [say your name], from falling into the lower existences!*

Make this invocation with deep devotion. Do not forget!

At this time, an individual who has accumulated merit and wisdom and who has practiced the sacred teaching in earnest will be welcomed by visions of great riches and will experience sublime states of bliss and joy. Those individuals who are indifferent or ignorant, who have been neither virtuous nor wicked, will experience neither happiness nor suffering, but only a state of indifference and ignorance.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, whichever condition occurs, whatever desirable object or rapturous or joyful state might arise, do not be attached. Do not fasten on them! Be free of attachment and grasping, and mentally offer these objects and experiences to your spiritual teacher and to the Three Precious Jewels. If the visions are neutral, devoid of pleasure or pain, relax in the state of the Great Symbol, naturally present pure awareness, beyond meditation and beyond distraction. This is important.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, at this time you will seek refuge from the terrifying visions beneath bridges, in mansions, in temples, thatched huts, or next to *stūpas*, and so forth, but any haven will be momentary, for it will not last. Your awareness, separated from a body, cannot stay still, and you will feel impulsive, angry, and distressed. Your consciousness will be wavering, shallow, and nebulous.

Again you will realize, "Alas! I am dead. What to do now?" Reflecting on this, your consciousness will be overwhelmed by sadness, your heart frozen, and you will feel deep and immeasurable anguish. Your mind will be compelled to move on, unable to settle in one place. Do not pursue thoughts of any kind! Relax your awareness in its natural state!

When you realize that you have no food except that which is dedicated to you and similarly no certainty of any friendship, know these to be signs that your mental body is wandering in the intermediate state of rebirth. Your feelings of contentment and sorrow are now determined by

your past deeds.

Again you will see your native land, your circle of friends and family, and even your corpse, and realize, "I am dead! What do I do?" Your existence as a mental body will deeply sadden you and cause you to yearn, "Oh, how I want a physical body." Owing to that wish, you will experience wandering everywhere in search of a body. You will try many times to reenter your own dead body, but a long time will have already passed in the intermediate state of reality. In the winter, your body would have become ice; in the summer, it would have rotted, or your relatives would have already cremated it, buried it in a grave, or handed it over to the birds or wild animals. In total misery, not finding a way to return, you will feel you are being crushed between rocks and stones. Torments such as these will afflict you. In the intermediate state of rebirth, so long as you search for a body, you will feel only suffering. Renounce your yearning for a body, therefore, and remain in a state of undistracted nonaction.

Liberation in the intermediate state can be achieved as a result of the above introduction. However, even though this introduction is given, owing to the dead person's negative past actions, recognition may not occur. Thus, again call the deceased by name and repeat these words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, [call the deceased by name], listen! You are suffering this torment because of your past actions. No one else is to blame. This is the result of your own deeds. Therefore, invoke with fervor the Three Precious Jewels. They will protect you. If you do not make an ardent invocation now, and do not know how to meditate on the Great Symbol, or if you are unable to meditate on a meditation deity, the intrinsic deity representing your good conscience will now amass all your good actions, and count them out with white pebbles. The intrinsic demon¹⁰³ representing your bad conscience will amass all your negative actions and count them out with black pebbles. Now, quaking with dread, apprehension,

and terror, you will lie, murmuring, “I have committed no negative actions.” At this, the Lord of Death declares, “I will look into the mirror of past actions.” Since in the mirror of past actions all your good and bad actions will appear clearly and exactly, your attempt at deception will have been useless.

Knotted a rope around your neck, the Lord of Death will drag you onward. He will sever your head, tear out your heart, pull out your entrails, lap your brains, drink your blood, devour your flesh, and gnaw on your bones. Despite all this, you will not die. Even though your body is repeatedly dismembered, it will continually renew itself. Hacked apart again and again, you will suffer atrociously.

From the moment the white pebbles are being counted, do not be afraid. Do not be terrorized. Stop lying, and do not be afraid of Yama! Your body is now a mental body; therefore you cannot die even though you experience being slain and cut into pieces.

Recognize that in reality your body is a natural form of emptiness and that thus you need have no fear. The acolytes of Yama are also natural forms of emptiness, your own illusory visions. Your body formed of mental proclivities is a natural form of emptiness. Emptiness cannot harm emptiness. The lack of characteristics cannot harm the lack of characteristics. Yama, gods, demons, and bull-headed *rakshas*¹⁰⁴ do not concretely exist distinct from or outside your illusory vision. Recognize this! Recognize now that all this is the intermediate state!

Dwell in contemplation of the Great Symbol. If you do not know how to meditate, look directly at the essence of what creates your fear and terror. You will discover a naked emptiness that has no existence whatsoever. This stark emptiness is the enlightened dimension of reality, the dharmakāya, and yet this emptiness is not a blank or nihilistic emptiness. The essential nature of this emptiness is an awesome, wakeful, and radiant pure awareness, the realized state of the dimension of perfect enjoyment, the sambhogakāya. Emptiness and clarity are not separate, for the essential nature of emptiness is clarity and the essential nature of clarity is emptiness. This indivisible, naked,

wide-open, and exposed awareness as it is right now in its natural unmodified state is the enlightened dimension of fundamental essence, the *svabhāvikakāya*.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the natural expressive energy of this fundamental essence that manifests everywhere without obstruction is the enlightened dimension of emanation, the *nirmāṇakāya*, the primordial compassionate potential.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen to me without distraction. Just by recognizing the essential nature of your experience in the above manner, you will become enlightened in the perfection of the four dimensions. Do not be distracted! The separation between buddhas and sentient beings is determined by this recognition. If you are distracted at this crucial point, the opportunity to escape from the quicksand of continuous suffering will be lost. Of this very moment, it is said:¹⁰⁶

In an instant, reality is clearly discerned.

In an instant, perfect enlightenment is attained.

Until yesterday, even though so many aspects of the intermediate state have manifested to you, you did not recognize your own nature because you were distracted. Thus you have experienced great fear and terror. If you remain distracted now, the cord of compassion held out to you will be severed, and you will stray to places where no chance of liberation remains. Be careful!

With this introduction, even though the deceased may not yet have gained recognition, he or she will do so at this stage, and thereby attain liberation. If, however, the deceased is an ordinary person who does not know how to meditate, advise him or her in the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you do not know how to meditate, call to mind the Buddha, the sacred teaching, the supreme community, and Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, and invoke them.

Meditate on all the awesome and terrible visions as being forms of Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, or

of your own meditation deity. Recall the secret name you were given during the empowerment rites in the human realm, and your spiritual teacher. Tell Yama Dharmarāja this secret name, and do not be afraid of him. Even if you were to fall over the precipices, you would not be harmed. Give up all your fears and terror!

With this introduction, although liberation may not have been achieved before, the deceased can become liberated at this stage. Yet, since it is possible that the deceased will not gain recognition even if the introduction has been given, it is important to persist. Therefore, again call the deceased by name, and say the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, your present visions can hurl you in an instant, like a catapult, into overwhelming states of happiness or pain. Therefore, do not regard what appears to you with attachment or aversion.

At the time when you are about to take birth in the higher realms and these visions have begun to manifest, it may be that you will see your relatives, left behind, sacrificing and dedicating many animals to benefit you, the deceased. Distorted impressions will thus arise in you, causing intense loathing that will link you to birth in the hell realms. Therefore, meditate on loving kindness, regardless of what acts your family may be performing in the place you left behind, and be sure that you do not let anger arise!

Instead, your mind might become fixed on the wealth and possessions you left behind, or else, coming to know that their ownership is now enjoyed by others, you may cling to those goods and also feel hatred toward those who now possess them. As a result, a link will certainly form that connects you to birth as a hell being or as a hungry ghost, although you may have been about to obtain birth in the higher realms. Even though you may still be attached to the wealth of your former life, you do not have the possibility of enjoying it. Since those riches are of no use to you, relinquish your attachment and fixation to what you have left behind. Abandon them. Be resolute.

Regardless of who is enjoying your wealth, do not be possessive. Forget it. With earnest aspiration, imagine that you are offering your possessions to the spiritual teacher and the Three Precious Jewels. Relax in a state free of attachment and clinging.

When the Kangkani¹⁰⁷ ritual for the dead and the rite of the Purification of the Lower Realms¹⁰⁸ are being chanted for your benefit, you may perceive with your subtle clairvoyance that they are being performed impurely and carelessly by some whose commitments and vows are tainted and whose conduct is distracted. Consequently, you will no longer trust them, regard them dismissively, and become acutely aware of their negative past actions as well as of their debased way of practicing the sacred teachings and rituals. Having realized this, you will be depressed and think, “Alas, they have betrayed me. They have truly undone me.” As a result of your deep disillusion, instead of maintaining a pure and respectful vision, you will have a negative outlook and mistrust will arise in you. With this attitude as a connecting link, you will certainly move toward the three lower existences, and your clairvoyance and the rites done on your behalf, instead of helping, will have done you great harm.

However impure the practice of the sacred teachings done by the friends now left behind, you must keep admiration and a pure vision of them in the core of your heart. Say to yourself, *It is my own vision that is impure. How can the speech of the buddhas be corrupt? I see these faults as a result of my own impure vision, like blemishes on my face reflected in a mirror. The bodies of the practitioners performing the rituals are the supreme community, their voices are the sacred teaching, and their minds are the essence of enlightened beings. I take refuge in them.* If you think in this way, these activities performed in the place you have left behind will certainly be of benefit to you. Thus to maintain a pure vision is of crucial importance. Remember this.

Moreover, if you keep your vision pure, even if you are to be born in one of the three lower existences, the visions of which are about to arise, you will see the relatives you have left behind practicing the holy teachings untouched

by negativity, and your spiritual teacher and other masters performing the rituals purely, with virtuous body, voice, and mind, and you will feel great joy. Simply through this experience of great joy, a link forms that will certainly help you to avoid the fall into a lower existence and to retrace your steps toward the higher realms. Since there is such benefit, do not slip into impure vision. To sustain pure vision, unbiased admiration and respect are of crucial importance. Be careful.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, in brief, since your awareness during this intermediate state lacks any physical support, it is airy and volatile, and the visions that arise, virtuous or nonvirtuous, are very powerful. Therefore, do not entertain nonvirtuous thoughts. Call to mind the virtuous practices of your past. Even if you did not do any spiritual practice, maintain a pure vision, and admiration and devotion. Invoke your meditation deity or Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, and with intense yearning make the following prayer:

Alas! Now, when I wander alone, separated from my dearest friends,

And the overwhelming images of emptiness that are my own manifestations arise,

May the enlightened beings reveal the power of their compassion,

And may the fear of the awesome and terrifying intermediate state be reversed.

When I experience suffering as a result of my negative past actions,

May the meditation deity dispel that affliction,

And when the natural sound of reality reverberates like a thousand thunderclaps,

May all sounds resonate as the Six Syllables.

When I am propelled by my karma, with no refuge to be found,

May Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, protect me,

And as I experience the suffering of habitual tendencies and former deeds,

May the contemplation of the clear light and bliss arise spontaneously.

Make this invocation with intense longing and you will certainly be guided onto the path. You can be utterly sure that this invocation will not delude you. This is extremely important.

Through these words, the deceased will regain his or her presence, and recognition will take place. Thus liberation will have been gained.

Obstructing Womb Entrances

Even though this introduction may have been given many times, recognition can be difficult because of the great power of negative past actions. Thus, at this point, it is beneficial to repeat the introduction many times. Again calling the deceased by name, pronounce the following words at least three times:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, since you have not taken to heart the introduction that was given before, from this time on the body of your past life will become vague and the body of your next life more clear. You will be disheartened, and you will think, "How miserable I am! I will take any body I can find." Feeling this way, you will approach erratically and without thought whatever appears, and as a result, the six lights indicative of the six realms of existence will manifest. The light of the realm in which you are about to be born in keeping with your past actions will shine the most brightly.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen! If you wonder what these six lights are, I will explain: a pallid white light indicative of the realm of the gods will manifest; a pallid red light indicative of the realm of the demigods will manifest; a pallid blue light indicative of the human realm will manifest; a dull green light indicative of the animal realm will manifest; a dull yellow light indicative of the realm of the hungry ghosts will manifest; and a dull hazy

light indicative of the realm of the hell beings will manifest. These six lights will arise. At that time, your body will assume the color of the realm in which you are to be reborn.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, at this crucial time, the fundamental points of the oral instructions are of extreme importance. Meditate now on the light that arises as Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One. Meditate, believing that the light that dawns is Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One. This is the deep essential point, vitally important because this oral instruction thwarts birth.

Alternatively, meditate for a long time on your meditation deity, whichever it may be, as an illusion, clearly apparent and yet devoid of any reality. This is called the practice of the pure illusory body.¹⁰⁹ Then dissolve the form of the meditation deity starting from the extremities until it disappears completely, and rest in the state of emptiness and clarity, where nothing at all concretely exists and where there is no subjective grasping. Meditate once more on the meditation deity, and then again on the clear light. Meditate alternately in this way, and then dissolve your awareness, starting from the extremities, into emptiness and radiance. Where there is space, there is awareness. Where there is awareness, there is the reality dimension of enlightenment, the dharmakāya. Rest nakedly and vividly in the state of the unobstructed reality dimension of enlightenment, free from concepts. If you rest in this state, birth will be prevented and you will attain enlightenment.

However, those lacking meditative experience and those whose spiritual practice is feeble will not comprehend nor be able to apply the above instructions. Again, bewildered and in disarray, they will wander toward the womb entrances. Therefore, the instructions that obstruct the womb entrances are crucial, and once more you must call the deceased by name, pronouncing the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you have not gained recognition through the introductions you have heard until now, at this time, due to the power of your past actions, you will feel that you are moving upward or horizontally or downward. When this takes place, meditate on Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One. Remember this! Thereafter, as described before, the vision will arise of your contending with whirlwinds, snowstorms, hail, or darkness, and of being pursued by hordes of humans that you will try to escape. Those who lack merit will have the impression that they are rushing toward a place of affliction. Those with merit will have the impression that they are arriving at a place of happiness.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, at this juncture, portents will appear of the place on one of the four continents where you are to be born. A number of profound principal points of oral instruction exist concerning this time. Listen without distraction. Though you have not taken seriously the fundamental knowledge previously introduced to you, you can do so now, for even those whose practice is feeble can grasp and apply the following essential points. So listen attentively!

Now, at this time, it is extremely important that you apply scrupulously the two methods that obstruct womb entrance: the first is the method that impedes the person who is about to enter the womb, and the second is the method that blocks the womb that is to be entered.

The oral teaching for the method that impedes the person who is about to enter the womb is as follows:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, [say the name of the deceased], vividly visualize your meditation deity, whichever it may be. Meditate on the deity as brilliantly present and yet devoid of an inherent nature, like the reflection of the moon in water. If you are not certain which is your meditation deity, then meditate intensely on any deity, believing Lord Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, is its nature. Then gradually dissolve

the form of the meditation deity, starting from the extremities until it disappears completely, and thereafter meditate in the state of clarity and emptiness, with no concept whatsoever. This is the deep essential point. Meditate like this, since it is said that through this method entry into a womb will be prevented.

If even this method does not obstruct the womb entrance, and the deceased is on the verge of entering a womb, other profound oral instructions exist which can obstruct the womb entrances.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, listen well! In the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States, the following lines are found. Repeat them after me:

*Now, as the intermediate state of rebirth rises before me,
I will maintain a strong resolve,
And determinedly unite with the propensities of my past good
deeds.
I will block the womb entrances and recall the methods of
reversal.
This is the moment when steadfastness and pure vision are vital:
I renounce all jealousy and meditate on my spiritual teacher in
union with his consort.*

Clearly pronounce these words aloud, and awaken your memory of past spiritual practices. It is important to meditate on the meaning of this invocation and to apply it experientially. The significance of these verses is as follows: the line “Now, as the intermediate state of rebirth rises before me” indicates that you are now wandering in the intermediate state of rebirth. As a sign of this, look at water. You will not see your image reflected. Moreover, your body does not cast a shadow. These are indications that you do not have a material body of flesh and blood, but that you are wandering as a mental body in the intermediate state of rebirth.

Now you must “maintain a strong resolve,” free from distraction. At this moment, your sheer intention is in itself

the most important factor, like a horse governed by its bridle. Whatever you resolve to do will come about, so do not focus your thoughts on negative past actions! Call to mind the links you have in the human world with the sacred teaching and instructions, the empowerments and oral transmissions you have received, and especially, remember the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, and so on. It is extremely important that you “determinedly unite” with the propensities of your past good deeds. Do not forget. Do not be distracted. The present moment is the dividing line between ascending to the upper realms and descending to the lower existences. If you indulge in laziness even for an instant, you will experience ceaseless suffering, just as now is the time when maintaining a strong resolve can bring you lasting happiness. Therefore concentrate your attention, and strive to elicit your past propensity for virtuous actions.

The time has come for you to block the womb entrances. The above verses say you must “block the womb entrances and recall the methods of reversal. This is the moment when steadfastness and pure vision are vital.” You are now at that point. Your priority is to obstruct the womb entrances. Keep the five methods that can block them well in mind.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, at this stage, you will have the vision of a male and female engaged in sexual intercourse. Beholding this, do not enter between them, but maintain your presence and meditate on the male and the female as your “spiritual teacher in union with his consort.” Prostrate yourself before them and make offerings, creating these with your mind. Regard your spiritual teacher and his consort with deep admiration and respect and request instructions from them. Just by generating this intense longing, you will certainly block the womb doors.

Should the womb entrances not be obstructed, and should you again be on the verge of entering a womb, then meditate on your teacher and his consort as your personal meditation deities, whichever these may be. If you do not

have a personal meditation deity, meditate on the spiritual teacher and his consort as being Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, and his consort. Again, make offerings, creating these with your mind, and with intense longing, think *Please grant me your spiritual accomplishment*. Through this second method, the womb entrances will be closed.

Should even this method not block the womb entrances, and should you again be on the verge of entering a womb, a third method that averts attachment and aversion will be taught to you. In this regard, there are four modes of birth: birth from an egg, birth from a womb, miraculous birth, and birth through warmth and moisture. Among these, birth from the egg and birth from the womb resemble each other, as in both cases you will see a male and female engaging in sexual intercourse, as described above. If at this time through either attachment or aversion you enter a womb, you will be born as a horse, a bird, a dog, a human, or whatever is appropriate in accordance with your past actions. If you are to be born as a male, you will have the feelings of a male with strong aversion for and envy of the father and an intense jealous attachment to the mother. If you are to be born as a female, you will have the feelings of a female with strong envy and jealousy of the mother and an intense attachment to and affection for the father. This emotional response will cause you to enter a womb.

Having entered the womb, you will experience innate delight in the meeting between the sperm and the ovum. This state of bliss will cause you to fall into unconsciousness, and as the weeks go by your body will come to maturity in the womb, passing through the various stages of embryonic and fetal development, that is, the slippery embryo, the thickening embryo,¹¹⁰ and so on, until you emerge from the womb and open your eyes. Now you may find that you have become a puppy. From the human you were before, you may have become a dog, for instance, with consequent suffering in a kennel, or, as the birth dictates, you may find yourself in a pigsty, an anthill, a wormhole, or else you may be born as a calf, a kid, a

lamb, and so on.

There is no returning. You will experience all varieties of suffering in a state of extreme stupidity and confusion. In this way you remain within the six realms of existence, including the realms of the hell beings and the hungry ghosts. Boundless suffering will make you wretched. Nothing is more devastating or frightening than this. Oh, this is terrifying! Alas, in this way those who do not have the oral instructions from a spiritual teacher will fall into the great abyss of cyclic existence and be tormented by continuous suffering. So listen to my words. Keep in mind this instruction of mine.

Now I will explain to you an oral instruction that blocks the womb entrances by reversing attachment and aversion. Listen and keep this in mind. It is said in the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States:

I will block the womb entrances and recall the methods of reversal.

*This is the moment when steadfastness and pure vision are vital:
I renounce all jealousy and meditate on my spiritual teacher with his consort.*

As explained before, if you are to be born as a male, you will be attached to the mother and hate the father. If you are to be born as a female, you will be attached to the father and hate the mother. You will feel strong jealousy. The following profound instruction applies to this stage.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, when these feelings of attachment and aversion manifest, meditate as follows:

Alas! Sentient beings of my kind with such negative past actions have until now been wandering in the cycle of existence. I have roamed incessantly in this way, propelled by my feelings of attachment and aversion. If I continue to be prey to attachment and aversion, I am in danger of wandering endlessly in the diverse states of cyclic existence, and risk plummeting for ages into the ocean of suffering. Now, from the very start, I will not create attachment and aversion. From this moment on, I shall never again be prompted by attachment and aversion.

As the tantras say, if you keep this intention firmly in mind, the womb entrances will be obstructed by your strong determination alone. O, Child of Enlightened Nature, do not be distracted. Focus on this intention single-mindedly.

But if even having done this, the womb entrances are not obstructed and the dead person is yet again on the verge of entering a womb, then the womb entrances should be obstructed by your giving the following oral instruction on the unreal and illusory nature of all phenomena.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, meditate as follows:

Alas! The father and mother in sexual union, the rain, the darkness, the hurricane, the ear-splitting sounds, the fearful and terrifying visions: the nature of these and of all phenomena is like an illusion. In whatever semblance they arise, phenomena are not real. All things are unreal and false, like a mirage. They are not enduring. They are not immutable. What is the purpose of being attached to them? What is the purpose of my awe and dread? All that which is nonexistent, I perceive as existent. All these visible phenomena are the manifestations of my own mind, yet the essential nature of the mind is nonexistent from the beginning, like an illusion. Thus how could such phenomena exist externally?

Since I did not understand this previously, I have considered the nonexistent to exist, the unreal to be real, illusions to be true. For this reason, I have wandered in cyclic existence all this time. If once again I do not understand that all these phenomena are illusions, I will continue to wander endlessly in cyclic existence, and I will certainly sink in the quicksand of every kind of suffering. Thus, I must now realize that all these phenomena do not truly exist even for a single instant. In fact, they are like a dream, like an illusion, like an echo, like a city of scent-eaters,¹¹¹ like a mirage, like a reflection, like an optical illusion, like the moon reflected in water.¹¹² It is certain that these phenomena are not real, that they are false. With single-minded resolution, I will destroy my conviction of their apparent reality. When, in this way, total confidence in the

unreality of phenomena arises in my mind, the conviction of their inherent existence will be reversed.

By knowing in the core of your being that all phenomena are unreal, the womb entrances will certainly be obstructed.

However, if the conviction that things have an inherent existence has not been destroyed even after this instruction has been imparted and the womb entrances are still not obstructed, and consequently the deceased is yet again on the verge of entering a womb, there is a last profound oral instruction.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if even after applying the above meditation, the womb entrances have not been closed, you should block them in accordance with the fifth method, by meditating on clear light. The manner of meditation is as follows:

Alas! All phenomena are manifestations of my own mind, yet this mind has the nature of emptiness, beyond birth and death.

Focus your thought in this way, and then, without modifying or altering your mind in any way, let it rest in its natural condition as water pours into water. Let the mind relax unmodified in its natural flow, clear and free. By following this instruction, you will definitely block the womb entrances to all four modes of birth. Meditate in this way again and again, until the womb entrances are closed.

Described above are various profound and authentic instructions for blocking the womb entrances. For those of superior, middling, or even low capacity, it is impossible not to attain liberation by means of these instructions. Should you wonder why this is so, it is because firstly, the consciousness in the intermediate state possesses a clairvoyance that, though limited, allows all that is said to be heard by the deceased. Secondly, even if the deceased was deaf or blind in life, in the intermediate state all sense faculties are perfect, and therefore what is said will be understood. Thirdly, since the deceased continuously falls prey to

fear and terror, he or she is undistractedly concerned about what action to take; thus, the deceased will pay attention to what is said. Fourthly, the consciousness, because it has no material support such as a body, is easy to guide and can immediately reach the core of whatever it focuses on. Moreover, since awareness is many times clearer, even the less acute at this time will have a limpid presence by virtue of their past actions and the natural ability of knowing how to meditate on what is taught to them.

These points are the reasons why it is impossible not to be liberated by the above instructions and also why it is extremely beneficial to perform rites on behalf of the dead. It is therefore of great importance to continue reading aloud the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States until the full forty-nine days are completed. If the deceased is not liberated at one introduction, he or she can be liberated at another, and this is why there are many introductions and why they need to be given often, not just once.

Choosing a Womb Entrance

Some types of people do not attain liberation, despite having received the above introductions and having been taught the visualizations and meditations explained before, because in former lives they practiced a negligible number of positive actions and a multitude of negative ones, and because the vestiges of those past evil actions have massive force and power. Therefore, if the womb entrances have not yet been obstructed employing the ways taught before, a profound oral instruction for choosing a favorable womb entrance will now be explained. Again call upon the buddhas and bodhisattvas for help, take refuge in the Three Supreme Jewels,¹¹³ and nurture an altruistic intention. Calling the deceased by name three times, repeat the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, [repeat the name of the deceased], listen well! Even though many introductions have been given to you before now, you still have not understood. Since you have not been able to block the womb entrances, now the time has come for you to take a

new body. Several profound and authentic instructions, not just one, can enable you to choose a favorable womb entrance. Keep them in mind! Understand them. Be determined, and keep these instructions present without becoming distracted!

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you are to be born as a human, now the signs and characteristic features of one of the four continents¹¹⁴ in which you could be born will manifest to you. You must recognize these signs and characteristic features, because you should choose the continent where you will be born based on a precise examination of these indications.

If you are to take birth on the eastern continent, Videha, you will see a lake embellished by male and female swans. Do not be attracted to that place. Recall the methods of reversal and apply them. If you were to go there, even though it is a pleasant place, you would find a land where the sacred teachings do not thrive. Do not approach this continent.

If you are to take birth on the southern continent, Jambudvīpa, you will see magnificent and delightful mansions. If you are able to enter here, do so!

If you are to take birth on the western continent, Aparagodāniya, you will see a lake whose shores are graced by male and female horses. Do not be attracted to that place. Recall the methods of reversal and apply them. Although it is a land of wealth and resources, the sacred teachings do not thrive here. Do not approach this continent.

If you are to take birth in the northern continent, Uttarakuru, you will see a lake whose shores are adorned with cattle or trees. Recognize these visions as signs of the birth you are about to assume. Do not go there either. Although in this land longevity and great merit are found, the sacred teachings do not thrive here. Do not approach this continent.

If you are to take birth as a god, you will see magnificent and delightful celestial palaces, multistoried and made of different jewels. If you are able to enter here, you should do so.

If you are to take birth as a demigod, you will see an exquisite and pleasing grove or spinning wheels of fire. Do not go there, under any circumstances. Recall the methods of reversal and apply them.

If you are to take birth as an animal, you will see rocky caverns, gullies, and thatched hutches, enveloped in mist. Do not go there either.

If you are to take birth as a hungry ghost, you will see tree stumps, black elongated forms, desolate ravines and gullies, or total darkness. If you were to go there, you would be born as a hungry ghost and would experience multiple sufferings of hunger and thirst. Do not go there under any circumstances. Recall the methods of reversal and apply them. Be staunch and courageous.

If you are to take birth as a hell being, you will hear the lamenting chants of those who committed negative actions in the past, or you will feel powerless and compelled to go toward this place. Thereafter, you will have the vision that you are entering a dark continent with red or black houses, black pits in the earth, and black roads. If you went there, you would find yourself in the hells, and experience the unbearable sufferings of heat and cold. Do not advance into this place, for no immediate possibility of escape exists. Be careful! Do not enter it under any circumstances. As it is said in the Root Verses, you must block the womb entrances and remember the methods of reversal. Now this is absolutely necessary.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, even though you may not wish to move toward these places, you will be powerless not to do so. You will have the vision of a legion of the enforcers of the laws of cause and effect pursuing you from behind, and have no alternative but to move ahead. You will try to avoid the avengers and assassins who are waiting for you ahead, and you will struggle through the darkness, the raging winds, the thunderous sounds, the snow, the rain, the hail, and the blizzard swirling around you.

Terrified, you will look for a refuge, and you will find protection inside enclosed spaces such as within the mansions mentioned before or in rocky shelters, in holes in

the ground, in groves, or nestled within the bud of a lotus flower. Hiding there, you will be reluctant to leave, and you will think, “I had best not show myself now.” Unwilling to abandon this space, you will become utterly attached to it. Because of your reluctance to emerge and face the fears and terrors of the intermediate state, you will continue to remain hidden there, full of dread. As a result, you will take an inferior body, however ill-fated it may be, and experience every kind of suffering. This feeling of wanting to hide indicates that you are hindered by demonic forces and *rāksasas*. A profound essential oral instruction exists specifically for this stage. Listen well, and keep it in mind.

Now you will be chased by the avenging legions of enforcers of the laws of cause and effect who are eager to punish you. Frightened and terrified, you feel without the power to escape. At this time you must visualize Mahottara Heruka,¹¹⁵ recalling the entire form in an instant, or Hayagrīva,¹¹⁶ or Vajrapāṇi,¹¹⁷ or else your own meditation deity, if you have one. Visualize¹¹⁸ the deity as an overwhelming wrathful manifestation with a huge body and massive limbs that reduces to dust all obstructing forces. Thus, saved from your pursuers by the blessing and compassion of the meditation deity, you will gain the capacity to choose a womb entrance. This is the authentic and profound essential point of the oral instructions. Keep it in mind this moment.

Moreover, O Child of Enlightened Nature, the gods of the form realms of meditative absorption and like beings of the higher realms take birth in these realms through the power of their meditative stability.¹¹⁹ Not only the gods, but also certain classes of malign forces, including the hungry ghosts, appear during this intermediate state through an alteration in their perception that allows their mental bodies to assume the form of a hungry ghost, demonic force, or *rāksasa* capable of displaying various miraculous feats. The hungry ghosts who reside in the depths of the ocean, the hungry ghosts who fly through space, the eighty thousand classes of obstructing forces, and so on can manifest in these ways because of this

change in the perceptual mode of their mental bodies.

At this time, therefore, it is crucial to keep in mind the meaning of emptiness, the essence of the Great Symbol. If you are unable to do so, you must apply your experience of the illusory nature of appearances. If you are unable to practice even in this way, meditate on the deity Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One, and do not develop attachment to anything whatsoever. By practicing this meditation you will attain enlightenment in the enjoyment dimension, the sambhogakāya, during the intermediate state.

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, if you must enter a womb due to the power of your past actions, another teaching for choosing a womb entrance will be taught. Listen well! Do not approach whatever womb entrance that appears to you! If you are helpless before the pursuing avengers who are the executors of the laws of cause and effect and are being swept impotently toward a womb, then meditate on Hayagrīva. Since now you possess a certain clairvoyance, you will recognize all the potential birthplaces as they manifest, one after the other. You must make your choice! Two oral instructions will guide you at this stage: first, the oral instructions for transferring the consciousness to a pure realm of enlightened ones; and second, the oral instructions for choosing a womb entrance within the impure state of cyclic existence. Listen and apply these methods as follows:

First, for you of highest capacity, the transference to the Pure Realm of the Skyfarers is gained by directing your aspiration in this way:

Alas! How sad! Even after an incalculable aeon, I remain enmeshed in the cycle of existence. How discouraging that so many have attained enlightenment in the past, while I still have not gained liberation. Samsāra is loathsome. It horrifies me. I totally repudiate it. The time has come for me to free myself. Hence, I will take birth miraculously in the bud of a lotus flower in the presence of Buddha Amitābha in the western pure realm of Blissful Sukhāvatī.

Focus your aspiration intensely on this thought, or otherwise on the pure realm you prefer: on the Perfect Joy

Abhirati, on the Richly Adorned Ghanavyūha, on Alakavati, on Mount Potalaka, on coming into the presence of Padmasambhava of Oddiyāna in the celestial palace of Lotus Light, or on whichever pure realm you wish to enter. Formulate your aspiration intensely and without distraction, directing it to the realm you wish as your birthplace, and you will be born immediately in the desired pure realm.

Or else, if you wish to find yourself in the presence of Maitreya in the realm of the Joyful Tusita, think as follows:

At this point in the intermediate state, the moment has come for me to seek the presence of the king of the sacred teaching, Ajita,¹²⁰ the Invincible Lord, in the realm of the Joyful. Therefore, I shall go there.

Focusing your aspiration accordingly, you will take birth miraculously in the heart of a lotus flower in the presence of Maitreya.

If you are unable to effect this transference and wish to enter a womb or are compelled to enter one, here are the instructions for choosing a womb entrance into impure cyclic existence. Listen well. Employing the clairvoyance you now possess, consider the continents as just described, and make your choice, singling out a land where the sacred teachings thrive.

However, although you might be about to enter matter that is fetid and filthy, you could perceive an execrable mound as sweet-scented and, drawn toward it, take birth within it. Be careful! Whenever inviting visions arise, do not trust them as real. Remain free from feelings of attachment and aversion, and with that as the premise, choose a womb entrance.

In order to choose an excellent birth, focusing your aspiration accompanied by the appropriate motivation is very important. Therefore, think in the following way:

For the benefit of all beings, I shall be born as a universal monarch;¹²¹ or as a protection for beings like a great śāl tree,¹²² I shall be born into the Brahman class;¹²³ or as the child of a consummate master; or into a family that holds a stainless lineage of the sacred teachings; or as the offspring of

a household where father and mother are deeply devout. Then, having taken a body endowed with the merit and the capacity to act for the benefit of all beings, I shall accomplish that benefit.

Focus your intentions in this way, and then enter a propitious womb. As you enter the womb, consecrate it, perceiving it as the inconceivable mansion of the deities. Make invocations as you enter, imagining that you are receiving empowerments from the enlightened beings of the ten directions, from the bodhisattvas, from the meditation deities, and in particular from Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One.

However, be careful. There is the risk of error in the choice of a womb entrance, because through the powerful influence of your past actions, you may perceive an excellent womb entrance as bad, and a bad womb entrance as good. At this time, the essential points of the teaching are very important. Therefore, again do as follows. Even though a vision of an excellent womb entrance may manifest, do not become attached to it, and on the contrary, even though you are confronted by a vision of a miserable womb entrance, do not feel aversion. The essential point of the profound and authentic instructions is to enter the womb in a state of total equanimity, beyond the duality of good and bad, acceptance and rejection, or attachment and aversion.

Nonetheless, apart from certain individuals who have experience of that state of equanimity, it is difficult for most to separate themselves from the vestiges of the sickness of negative habitual tendencies. Therefore, if the deceased is unable to free himself or herself from attachment and aversion in the above way, it may be that negative beings of the lowest capacity will seek refuge in the animal realm or similar inferior births. To avert this, call the deceased by name and repeat the following words:

O, Child of Enlightened Nature, since you do not know how to choose a womb entrance and are unable to free yourself from your attachment and aversion, regardless

which of the aforementioned visions may appear, you must invoke the Three Precious Jewels by name. Take refuge in them! Invoke Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One. Proceed with your head held high. Recognize the nature of the intermediate state. Give up your attachment and clinging to friends, sons, daughters, and family that you have left behind. All these friends and so forth are of no help to you. Enter the blue light of the human realm. Enter the white light of the god realm. Enter the celestial palaces of precious jewels and the bliss-filled gardens.

Recite this introduction up to seven times. Then pray to the buddhas and bodhisattvas by reciting the Invocation That Calls to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help. Read aloud, up to seven times, the Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States, the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States, and the Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate States. Next, read aloud, clearly and with accurate pronunciation, Liberation through Wearing: Natural Liberation of the Aggregates,¹²⁴ as well as the Spiritual Practice of the Natural Liberation of Habitual Tendencies.¹²⁵

Conclusion

THUS BY PRACTICING correctly, yogins with high realization will successfully perform the transference of consciousness at the moment of death, and released from the need to wander in the intermediate states, will become liberated in a direct and unobstructed manner. Yogins of somewhat lesser capacity, though experienced in practice, having recognized the clear light of reality during the intermediate state of the moment of death, will become liberated in a direct and unobstructed manner. Yogins with still less ability but nonetheless with good meditative experience will recognize the clear light of reality at the completion of the intermediate state of the moment of death, and will similarly attain liberation in a direct and unobstructed manner. Some, still less adept, will attain liberation at one point or another during the weeks following the moment of death in accord with their propensities from past actions and their degree of proficiency, as the visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities gradually manifest in the intermediate state of reality. Since there is a succession of passages in the intermediate state, recognition can take place in any of them, whichever is appropriate, during the intermediate state of reality, and thereby liberation will take place.

Even so, those who are only feebly influenced by positive past actions, those who are enveloped in the dark shroud of ignorance, and those who have committed the most severe negative actions in the past will be compelled to wander downward into the intermediate state of rebirth. In this case too, since there are varying levels of introduction like the rungs of a ladder, recognition can take place, if not at one level, then at another, and thereby the deceased will become liberated.

However, for those mentioned who have only slight propensities from positive past actions and who thus fail to achieve recognition, consequently falling prey to fright and terror, there is a series of different levels of instructions for blocking and for choosing a womb entrance. Thus, even if

recognition does not take place in the course of one such instruction, these individuals will be introduced to another teaching, and upon understanding the focus of the meditation, they will obtain the boundless good fortune of the higher existences. Even the very lowest, who are like beasts, by virtue of the power of taking refuge will step back from taking birth in the inferior realms and will obtain a precious human body, endowed with freedom and favorable conditions. Then, in the coming life, they will meet a spiritual teacher or spiritual friend and will receive the teaching, and thereby liberation will be attained.

This sacred teaching, when heard in the intermediate state of rebirth, reconnects the deceased with their past inclinations for positive actions. For this reason it is said to be like a tube inserted into a damaged pipe that restores the flow of water. Therefore, even for those whose negative actions have been grave, it is impossible not to achieve liberation upon hearing this teaching. This occurs because both the compassionate invitation of the peaceful and wrathful conquerors and the invitation of the demonic and obstructing forces manifest simultaneously during the intermediate states. Simply because the dead person hears this sacred teaching at this time, his or her vision is transformed, and liberation is attained.

Moreover, the visions of the intermediate state are easily transformed because the deceased possesses a mental body, not one of flesh and blood. However far the deceased may have wandered into the intermediate states, he or she continues to hear and see with a subtle natural clairvoyance derived from the potential of past actions. Thus, if the deceased becomes aware and grasps these necessary instructions, he or she will be capable of transforming his or her vision in an instant. That is why this reminder is extremely beneficial. Its power is like that of a catapult and resembles the way in which a huge tree trunk that cannot be lifted by a hundred people once floated on water can be directed wherever wanted in a moment. The effect of this teaching is like guiding a horse by its bridle.

For this reason, all those who have died should be attended to as follows: if the corpse is present, a friend should sit close by, and repeatedly read aloud the words of the instructions. The recitation should continue at least until blood and serum emerge from the nostrils of the deceased. Until then, the corpse should

not be moved. The commitments of this spiritual practice are as follows: no animal should be killed and dedicated to the deceased; relatives and friends, your or others, should not weep, shriek, mourn, or wail in the presence of the corpse, and instead should perform many good actions. In addition, it would be extremely appropriate if this sacred teaching of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States were accompanied by the recitation of other meditation texts, regardless of the origin of these sacred teachings.

This Great Liberation should be recited continuously, and its words and meanings learned by heart. If the physical condition of the dying person permits, when the arising of the intermediate state of death becomes certain and the signs of approaching death are recognized, that person should read this text, and reflect on its words and meanings. If the physical condition does not allow this, then a fellow spiritual practitioner should be entrusted with reading it aloud. Reminded in this way, the deceased without doubt will definitely become liberated.

This sacred teaching does not require prior meditation practice and is a profound instruction that liberates upon seeing, liberates upon hearing, and liberates upon reading aloud. This profound instruction can lead even the most negative beings onto the direct path of liberation. Make sure that its words and meanings are engraved in your memory and cannot be forgotten, even if you were to be pursued by a pack of seven fierce dogs. This is a secret instruction for the attainment of enlightenment at the time of death. It would not be possible for all the enlightened ones of the three times to find a teaching greater than this.

The instruction on the intermediate state that liberates mortal beings, the profound pure essence titled Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, is now complete. The consummate master Karma Lingpa discovered this precious treasure on Mount Gampodar. May it benefit the Teaching and all sentient beings.

Mangalam!

Invocations

ABOUT THESE INVOCATIONS

THE FOLLOWING three invocations should be recited by the dying person if possible or by an experienced spiritual practitioner for the sake of a person who has entered an intermediate state. Although the words of the invocations appear to be directed to the buddhas, the bodhisattvas, and the peaceful and wrathful deities, their main purpose is not that of a prayer requesting help. The invocations are meant to reconnect the deceased with the meditation he or she practiced during life in order to create an awareness of the nature of the intermediate state, to avoid a fall into frightening states caused by the illusions during this state, and to help the person recognize the intermediate state as an opportunity to realize the true nature of the mind. For these three purposes, the invocations aim to reawaken the faith and devotion of the dying or the deceased in the meditation deities that he or she trusted while alive.

The Invocation That Calls the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help: Natural Liberation from Fear¹

First, make offerings, actual and imagined, to the Three Supreme Jewels. Then, with a lit stick of sweet-scented incense in your hand, say these words with intense devotion:

O, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas dwelling in the ten directions, graced with compassion, graced with knowledge, graced with the eye of wisdom, graced with loving kindness, you who are the refuge of all sentient beings, come to this place through the power of compassion, and accept these offerings, actual and

imagined!

O, Compassionate Ones, you possess all-knowing wisdom, loving compassion, enlightened activity, and the power to bestow protection beyond all limits. Come, I beseech you!

O, Compassionate Ones, I [say your name] am now leaving this world for another shore, cast off from this world, nearing the great transition of death, without a friend, in great suffering, without refuge, without a protector, without an ally. The vision of this life is vanishing. I am proceeding toward another existence, stumbling into impenetrable darkness, falling into a bottomless abyss. Entering a dense forest of illusory thought, I am hunted down by the power of past actions, entering a vast wilderness, swept away by the waves of a great ocean, whirled on the winds of karma. Treading where the ground is not solid, thrust onto an immense battlefield, clutched at by evil demons, I am full of fear and terrorized by the messengers of the Lord of Death. Risking entry yet again into another existence because of my past actions, I am powerless. Now the time has come when I must go on ahead, alone and without a friend!

O, Compassionate Ones, be my refuge, I, [say your name], who has no refuge! Protect me! Be my ally! Save me from the great darkness of the intermediate state! Ward off the great tempest of my past actions! Protect me from the great fear and terror of the Lord of Death! Rescue me from the long and perilous corridors of the intermediate state!

O, Compassionate Ones, be generous in your compassion! Help me! Do not let me be flung into the three inferior existences! Do not hesitate, maintain the vows you made long ago, and quickly reveal the power of your compassion.

O, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, be kind to me, [say your name], be unsparing in your compassion and skillful means! Seize me with your compassion! Do not let me, a sentient being, be crushed by the weight of my negative past actions!

O, Three Supreme Jewels, I beseech you, be my refuge from the suffering of the intermediate states!

This invocation should be recited aloud three times with intense devotion by you and all others. Thereafter, read the Great

Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, followed by the Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate States and the Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States.

May the effect of the Invocation That Calls the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help, continue until cyclic existence is emptied.

Samaya gyā gyā gyā!

This invocation was composed by the master from Oddiyāna, Padmasambhava. Tsögyal wrote it down and hid it. Later, Karma Lingpa discovered it on Mount Gampodar.

The Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate States

Homage to the precious teachers, meditation deities, and dākinīs.

May I be guided on the path by your great love!

*As I wander in utter bewilderment through the cycle of existence,
May the spiritual teachers, holders of the oral lineages, guide
me On the path of the radiant light of undistracted study,
reflection, and meditation.*

*May the supreme consorts, the hosts of dākinīs, following behind,
sustain me.*

*Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the
intermediate state,*

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.

*As I wander impelled by deep-rooted habitual tendencies through
the cycle of existence,*

May the conqueror Vairocana guide me

*On the path of the radiant light of the wisdom of the expanse of
reality.*

*May the supreme consort Ākāśadhātviśvarī, following behind,
sustain me.*

*Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the
intermediate state,*

May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.

As I wander impelled by deep-rooted aversion through the cycle of existence,
May the conqueror Vajrasattva guide me
On the path of the radiant light of mirrorlike wisdom.
May the supreme consort Buddhalocanā, following behind, sustain me.
Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the intermediate state,
May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.
As I wander impelled by deep-rooted pride through the cycle of existence,
May the conqueror Ratnasambhava guide me
On the path of the radiant light of the wisdom of equality.
May the supreme consort Māmaki, following behind, sustain me.
Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the intermediate state,
May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.
As I wander impelled by deep-rooted attachment through the cycle of existence,
May the conqueror Amitābha guide me
On the path of the radiant light of discerning wisdom.
May the supreme consort Pāndaravāsinī, following behind, sustain me.
Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the intermediate state,
May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.
As I wander impelled by deep-rooted envy through the cycle of existence,
May the conqueror Amoghasiddhi guide me
On the path of the radiant light of action-accomplishing wisdom.
May the supreme consort Samayatārā, following behind, sustain me.
Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the intermediate state,

*May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.
As I wander impelled by the virulent five poisons through the cycle of existence,
May the divine warriors of the five enlightened families guide me
On the path of the radiant light, union of the four wisdoms.
May the five supreme female buddhas, nature of the expanse of reality, following behind, sustain me.
Thus surrounded, protected from the dim paths of the six realms of existence,
May I be accompanied to the five utterly supreme and pure realms.²*

*As I wander impelled by deep-rooted habitual tendencies through the cycle of existence,
May the assembly of spiritual heroes and knowledge-holders Guide me on the path of the radiant light of innate wisdom.
May their supreme consorts, the hosts of dākinis, following behind, sustain me.
Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the intermediate state,
May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.
As I wander impelled by profoundly bewildering visions through the cycle of existence,
May the assembly of blood-drinking wrathful deities Guide me on the path of the radiant light free of fear and terrifying visions.
May the assembly of the Krodheśvari, queens of the expanse of reality, following behind, sustain me.
Thus surrounded, protected from the frightening passage of the intermediate state,
May I be accompanied to total and perfect enlightenment.
Om ah hum³
May the space element not appear to me as a foe;
May I see it as the pure realm of the blue buddha.
May the water element not appear to me as a foe;
May I see it as the pure realm of the white buddha.*

*May the earth element not appear to me as a foe;
May I see it as the pure realm of the yellow buddha.
May the fire element not appear to me as a foe;
May I see it as the pure realm of the red buddha.
May the air element not appear to me as a foe;
May I see it as the pure realm of the green buddha.
May sounds, lights, and rays not appear to me as foes;
May I see them as the infinite pure realms of the peaceful and wrathful deities.
May the rainbow-colored elements not appear to me as foes;
May I see them as the pure realms of countless buddhas.
May I recognize all sounds as my own sound.
May I recognize all lights as my own light.
May I recognize all rays as my own rays.
May I spontaneously recognize the intermediate states as my true nature.
May I manifest the pure realms of the three enlightened dimensions.⁴*

Samaya gya gya gya!

The Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate States was composed by Padmasambhava, the master from Oddiyāna. May the power of this invocation continue until cyclic existence is emptied.

The Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States

Homage to the Peaceful and Wrathful Victorious Ones.

*Alas! Now that my life span is ending,
I wander by myself in the intermediate state.
Friends and relatives of this world can no longer help me, May
the peaceful and wrathful buddhas swiftly reveal the power of*

*their compassion,
And disperse the dense darkness of my ignorance.*

*Now that I journey alone, separated from my loved ones,
Now that images of emptiness, my own manifestations, arise,
May the enlightened beings swiftly reveal the power of their
compassion
So that fear of the awesome intermediate states dissolves.*

*When the five radiant lights of wisdom shine,
May I recognize them without fright and terror as my own state.
When the forms of the peaceful and wrathful deities manifest,
May I, fearless and confident, recognize the nature of the
intermediate states.*

*When I suffer because of past negative actions,
May the Great Compassionate One dispel that pain.
When the natural sound of reality crashes like a thousand
thunderbolts,
May I hear it as the teaching of the Greater Vehicle.*

*When I wander without refuge, driven by past negative acts, May
the Peaceful and Wrathful Victorious Ones dispel that
suffering.*

*When I experience the affliction of habitual tendencies, May the
blissful contemplation of luminous clarity arise in me.*

*When I am miraculously born in the intermediate state of rebirth,
May I not be deceived by the false indications of demons.*

*When I arrive wherever my thought takes me, May disorienting
fear created by my past actions not arise.*

*When the snarls of savage beasts surround me, May the sound
transform into the dharma of the sacred Six Syllables.*

*When I am hounded by snow and rain, wind and darkness, May
I see with the clairvoyant eye of radiant wisdom.*

*May beings in the intermediate state like me in kind Be born in
higher realms, and feel no rivalry.*

*When strong emotions engender hunger and thirst, May the
ordeals of hunger and thirst, heat and cold, not arise.*

*When I see my future parents in sexual union,
May I see them as Mahakarunika, the Great Compassionate One,
and his consort,*

*And having attained the power to choose my birthplace, for the
benefit of others*

*May I obtain a supreme body, enhanced with the auspicious
major and minor signs.*

Once I have been born with a supreme human body

May all beings who see and hear me be swiftly liberated.

*May I not be led by the negative deeds of my past, But increase
and emulate my past merits.*

*Wherever I am born, in whatever land, May I meet the
meditation deity of my past life.*

*Able from the moment of birth to speak and understand, May I
remember my previous lives and gain the power of total recall.*

May I at first glance, through study and reflection,

Master the various stages of knowledge – high, middle, and low.

May the land where I am born be filled with good auspices,

And may all living beings enjoy happiness.

O, Peaceful and Wrathful Buddhas,

May I and all other beings become like you,

*With your forms, your retinues, your life span, and your pure
realms,*

And in every aspect of your supreme auspicious marks.

*Through the compassion of Samantabhadra and the infinite
Peaceful and Wrathful deities,*

Through the sovereignty of the truth of utterly pure reality,

*And through the blessing of tantric practitioners who meditate
one-pointedly,*

May every aspiration in this invocation be fulfilled.⁵

This *Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States* was composed by the master from Oddiyana, Padmasambhava. May the power of this invocation continue until cyclic existence is emptied.

SAMAYA *gya gya gya!*

This is a treasure text of *tulku* Karma Lingpa.

The Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States

ABOUT THESE VERSES

THE CYCLE OF LIFE and death as it refers to spiritual practitioners is said to be composed of six intermediate states, namely of living, dreaming, meditation, the moment of death, reality, and rebirth.¹ The intermediate state of living is the period that extends from birth to the moment of death. As advised in the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States, during this period, make use of the opportunity offered by the precious human life in order to realize your true nature. The intermediate state of dreaming is the period that extends from the moment of falling asleep to the moment of awakening. During this period, make use of the opportunity to maintain the presence of the clear light. The intermediate state of meditation is the period during which the practitioner abides in contemplation in his or her true nature. Thus abiding, you awaken your innate enlightened qualities and can use this experience later to maintain contemplation throughout the death process and the intermediate states that follow the moment of death.

The intermediate state of the moment of death begins when the definite signs of death manifest and ends when the visions of the intermediate state of reality arise. At this moment, just by maintaining the presence of your true nature, transference of the consciousness into the space of the reality dimension of enlightenment or dharmakāya occurs naturally. Once the signs of death have fully manifested, you will meet the clear light of your true nature beyond dualism and spontaneously recognize your own primordial state of enlightenment.

The intermediate state of reality is the period extending from the end of the intermediate state of the moment of death until the intermediate state of rebirth begins. In life, practitioners learn to

abide in their true nature, and from within that state train in manifesting the peaceful and wrathful deities through sound, light, and rays. Through that familiarity, when the various bewildering manifestations of sound, light, rays, and deities arise, the dead are able to recognize what they see as their own creative energy and become enlightened in the primordial source of these manifestations.

The intermediate state of rebirth arises after the visions of the intermediate state of reality cease. The consciousness of the individual in the form of a mental body beholds the environments of his or her past and undergoes various harsh experiences. By recalling the spiritual training done during one's lifetime, a practitioner has the opportunity to achieve liberation by realizing the insubstantial nature of everything experienced at this time, nullifying the risk of rebirth, or at least gaining the possibility of choosing an advantageous rebirth in order to continue on a spiritual path.

The Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States

Homage to the Peaceful and Wrathful Victorious Ones

*Alas! Now, as the intermediate state of living arises before me,
Shedding indolence for which life has no time,
I will enter without distraction on the path of study, reflection,
and meditation.*

*Taking sense perception and the nature of the mind as the path,
I will train in manifesting the three enlightened dimensions.
Now that I have obtained a precious human body,
I do not have leisure to remain in the ways of distraction.*

*Now, as the intermediate state of dreams arises before me,
Shedding the corpse-like sleep of uncaring ignorance,
I will relax in the natural state of undistracted presence.
Recognizing dreams, I will train in generating and transforming
them,
And with clarity, having overcome beast-like slumber,*

I will treasure the practice of integrating sleep and clear light.²

*Now as the intermediate state of meditation arises before me,
Shedding the multitude of distractions and fantasies,
I will rest in the state beyond limitations without grasping or
losing focus,
And achieve stability in the practices of generation and
completion.*

*Now free of all activity, practicing single-mindedly,
I will not be swayed by deceptive emotions.*

*Now as the intermediate state of the moment of death arises
before me,*

*Shedding all attachment, grasping, and compulsion,
I will remain without distraction in the state in which the
meaning of the oral teaching is clear,
And transfer my pure awareness into the unborn expanse of
space.*

*As soon as I separate from this amalgam of flesh and blood,
I will recognize my body as an ephemeral illusion.*

*Now as the intermediate state of reality arises before me,
Shedding all feelings of terror and fear,
I will recognize whatever appears as a natural manifestation of
my own pure awareness.*

*Knowing that sound, light, and rays are apparitions of the
intermediate state,*

*Now that I have come to this crucial point,
I will not fear the host of peaceful and wrathful deities that
emanate from myself.*

*Now as the intermediate state of rebirth rises before me,
I will maintain a strong resolve,
And determinedly unite with the propensities of my past good
deeds.
I will block the womb entrances and recall the methods of*

reversal.

*This is the moment when steadfastness and pure vision are vital:
I renounce all jealousy and meditate on my spiritual teacher with
his consort.*

Accomplished masters have spoken these words:

*“Because of indifference, thinking that death will never come,
“Bewitched by the meaningless activities of this life,
“If you were to return empty-handed, would not all your
aspirations be confounded?*

*“Recognize what you truly need is the sacred teaching!
“So why not practice the divine teaching from this moment on?”
It is also said,
“If I do not take my master’s teachings to heart,
“Do I not become my own betrayer?”*

May the power of the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States
be unceasing until cyclic existence is emptied.

Epilogue

THE CRYPTIC TITLE added to this book, *Awakening Upon Dying*, corresponds literally to the purpose at the source of this teaching and points the way to a profound method for reaching that goal. It is also a metaphor for renewal on an earthly plane through profound communion with the deepest levels of self. Hopefully all those who have the good fortune to chance upon this ancient text and who feel an interest in its ultimate goal will choose to reap the full benefits of this rare encounter and seek out a qualified holder of the living transmission.

N.S.

Appendix A

Recognizing the Signs of Encroaching Death

EVERYTHING THAT accumulates at the end separates. An infant over the years grows into an adult, and the adult becomes an old man or old woman and dies. We know that in most cases one of the sufferings that marks the beginning of our exit from this world is illness. Even if not affected by a particular disease, the human body slowly deteriorates with age and loses its ability to function in a normal way. Eventually this condition leads to death. As a person enters the final stage of life, signs of approaching death¹ and then of imminent death manifest. Among the signs of approaching death are particular dreams described in the Explanatory Tantra² of Tibetan medicine as follows:

Dreaming of riding a cat, a monkey, a tiger,

A fox, or a human corpse is an indication of death.

Dreaming of riding southward, naked on a buffalo, a horse, a pig, a donkey,

Or a camel is an indication of death.

Dreaming of a bird's nest in a bush growing on the crown of your head,

Of a barbed palm tree growing from your heart, Of a lotus emerging from the heart,

Of falling into an abyss,

Of sleeping in a charnel ground,

Of having your skull fractured,

Of being surrounded by ravens, or tormented by spirits and evildoers,

Of having the skin stripped from your legs,
Of reentering your mother's womb,
Of being swept away by a river current or of sinking into a quagmire,
Of finding iron or gold, of being defeated in business or in a fight,
Of being prosecuted for tax evasion, of taking a bride,
Of sitting naked, of having a haircut or the beard shaven,
Of drinking ale with the dead or of being led away by them,
Of wearing red clothes or a red necklace,
And of dancing with the dead,
Are all dreams influenced by the Lord of Death.

These and other inauspicious dreams

Manifest as a result of the humors obstructing the course of the mind in the channels.

If these dreams occur repeatedly, the sick person will die.
If a healthy person has these sorts of dreams, they do not necessarily foretell death;
With the appropriate methods, death can be averted.

Sudden changes in character of the sick person can also foretell death. Likewise, sudden and unmotivated differences in physical appearance, speech, and attitude indicate that death is impending, though it may not be imminent. When such permutations occur, death can be expected in a few weeks.

As the condition of the person worsens, the signs of impending death manifest, described as follows in the Tibetan medical tantras:

Bleeding from any of the nine orifices even though poison has not been ingested nor a wound inflicted by weapons,
Forgetting what you have just said,
Retraction of the penis and protrusion of the testicles or vice versa,

Coughing or sneezing with an unusual sound,
Insensitivity to the odor of an expiring butter lamp,
Feeling no pain when hair is plucked out, or developing an oily patch on the crown of the head,
Formation of a new part in the hair and eyebrows, or bristling of the hair and eyebrows,
Lines resembling a crescent moon on the forehead and above the bladder,
Failure to perceive ordinary objects even though the sense organs are intact and healthy,
And perceiving imaginary forms and sounds:
All these are indications of impending death.
Inability to see the forearm when raised in the space between the eyebrows,
Inability to perceive light when the eyes are pressed,
Remaining long periods with the eyes wide open and fixed like a sleeping rabbit, or with
Sunken eyes and lusterless pupils are further indications of death.
Adherence of the ears to the skull,
Interruption of the humming sound usually perceived when the ears are cupped,
Distension of the nostrils and nostrils covered in dry mucus,
Darkness, dryness, and shortening of the tongue,
Inability to speak,
Descent of the lower lip and rising of the upper lip,
Perspiration covering the face,
A cold breath flowing through the nostrils,
A continual black coating of the teeth,
Difficult inhalation and the disappearance of body heat,
Manifestation of a hot nature illness with a cool body temperature,
The refusal of food and of a hot regimen in the presence of a cold nature illness,

Ineffectuality of diet, behavior, medication, and external therapies,

And slight recovery brought about by wrong therapies:

These are indications of impending death.

The following signs indicate that death is immediately imminent:

These are physiological signs that reflect progressive loss of the functioning of the elements of the dying person's body:

Upon absorption of the earth element into the water element, the person ceases to perceive gross and subtle forms.

Upon the absorption of the water element into the fire element, the nine orifices become desiccated, losing their wet and humid aspects.

Upon the absorption of the fire element into the air element, body heat disappears gradually, beginning from the extremities.

Upon the absorption of the air element into the space element, breathing and the outer functions of the body cease.

The progressive absorption of the potentialities of the five elements is accompanied by the loss of the sense functions: first, of the eye consciousness, followed by the ear consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustatory consciousness, and lastly, the tactile consciousness, which dissolves in the vital energy. The vital energy in turn merges into the consciousness that moves on as the basis of another existence. When such signs manifest, placing hope in doctors, medicines, and other remedies to save the life of that person is useless. Instead, accept the realization that this being is about to die, and accompany him or her with awareness to the door of death.

Appendix B

Further Ways to Assist the Dying and the Dead

THE ADDITIONAL ADVICE for helping a person at the moment of death and in the postmortem states explained in the paragraphs below is largely based on a short text appended to an edition of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States that bears no colophon.¹ The appended text is titled in essence “Making Clear the Recited Introductions That Quickly Liberate Beings from the Obscurity of the Intermediate States of Reality and of Rebirth.”² The explanatory comments listed below are noted in the instructions section of the main text at the appropriate points.

Comment 1

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 9)

It is customary to place within view of the dying person offerings such as sacred representations, mantras printed in circles on paper or cloth that liberate on sight, representations of the pure lands of the reality (*dharma**kāya*), enjoyment (*sambhogakāya*), and emanation (*nirmāṇakāya*) dimensions of enlightenment, images of the spiritual teacher, and paintings of the peaceful and wrathful deities, as well as other objects.

Comment 2

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 13)

If the root teacher is not available, a spiritual teacher endowed

with the three trainings, ethics, meditation, and discerning wisdom, can be invited. As a base, the oral teaching should be given by a spiritual practitioner with an altruistic heart who has not broken his or her commitments and in whom the dying person has faith. A respectful, compassionate, and intelligent person, someone who has a calm nature, should read aloud with correct pronunciation and clear diction the introductions to the intermediate states of the moment of death, of reality, and of rebirth at least three times.

Comment 3

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 14 in “*Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base*”)

Before respiration ceases, speak into the ear of the dying person, describing again and again the way in which the power of the five winds³ becomes exhausted and how the four elements dissolve progressively, until this knowledge is firmly fixed in his or her mind, as follows:

Now, as the power of the fire-accompanying wind⁴ vanishes, you refuse to eat; as the life-sustaining wind⁵ vanishes, your mind becomes unclear; as the downward-clearing wind⁶ vanishes, you lose urine and feces; as the ascending wind⁷ vanishes, you cannot swallow food or drink, you can hardly speak, and your breath becomes short; as the all-pervading wind⁸ vanishes, you are unable to move your body. These signs indicate that death is close.

As a sign that the ear consciousness is ceasing, you hear the recitation and the speech of people around you only as the sound *ur tir tir*. As a sign that the visual consciousness is ceasing, you see forms but cannot identify them. Now you cannot smell odors nor perceive tastes, and you lose the tactile sense.

Comment 4

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 18 in “*Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base*”)

Unless the person does not need the transference of consciousness, when the succession of signs is nearly completed and respiration is about to cease, the crown of the head should be anointed with an ointment made with substances that liberate upon touch and strong ale. Then the practice of the transference of consciousness for the transmigration of the deceased should be performed.

A dying person with adequate meditative experience of the profound path of the transference of consciousness can sever completely the attachment to this life on his or her own, or achieve this result through the reminder of a spiritual friend. Generating courage, he or she should think joyfully, “Relying on the spiritual master’s instructions, I shall reach a pure realm like an arrow shot by a skilled archer,” and perform the transference of consciousness with vigor.

If the transference is performed by someone else, that person should be a yogin with knowledge of the minds of beings in the intermediate state and of the possible places of rebirth. If such a yogin performs the transference at the correct time, that is, when the breathing has ceased but the inner breath is still present, the benefit accrued is great, and it has the power of preventing birth in the lower forms of existence. It is to be completely condemned that someone perform the ritual of transference of consciousness for another a long time after that person’s death, summoning the consciousness back into the corpse motivated by obtaining the payment of a fee.

Comment 5

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 20 in “*Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base*”)

Incense whose fragrance grants liberation should be burned in the proximity of the dying person, and the dying person should ingest relics of enlightened beings that cause liberation upon being consumed as well as correctly empowered pills made with the flesh of one who was born seven times as a realized being. If the dying person is a male, a volume of the *Liberation through Wearing* and mantras of liberation written on a circle of paper (*khorlo*) should be placed under the left armpit; if female, under

the right armpit. The body of the dying person should be laid on its right side in the lion posture with the head toward the north, facing west.

Comment 6

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 24 in “*Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base*”)

Now from the depths of your heart, recite aloud repeatedly the names of the buddhas, special dharanis,⁹ and the invocation beginning with the words “Padmasambhava Amitābha”¹⁰ that belongs to the Liberation through Wearing. Relatives and friends should be asked to exercise restraint, for at this point it is not befitting to speak and behave in a way that could arouse anger in the deceased. Nothing that inspires attachment should disturb the dead being, and crying and weeping should not reach his or her ears.

Comment 7

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 26 in “*Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base*”)

If the transference of consciousness is not performed or was not successful, consciousness dissolves into space: the six consciousnesses cease, all the blood of the body converges in the aorta,¹¹ and three drops of blood collect at the heart. Because of that process, three long exhalations occur, and thereafter respiration ceases quickly.

At that time, white obtained from the father descends from the crown of the head: as an outer sign, the consciousness experiences the arising of a white light, resembling a clear sky suffused with moonlight; as an inner sign, the consciousness experiences clarity, and simultaneously the thirty-three concepts related to aversion¹² cease. This phase is known as light. The red vital essence obtained from the mother then ascends from the navel: as an outer sign, the consciousness experiences the arising of a red light, resembling a clear sky suffused with sunlight; as an

inner sign, great bliss is felt, and simultaneously the forty concepts related to attachment¹³ cease. This phase is known as increase. Then consciousness enters the white and red vital essences at the heart: As an outer sign, the experience of a black light arises, resembling a clear sky suffused with darkness; as an inner sign, the experience of nonthought arises, and consciousness fades into total darkness.¹⁴ This phase is known as attainment.¹⁵

Thereafter, appearing like a pure sky, the clear light of the base liberated from the three disturbing factors arises, and consciousness, which had ebbed away, reawakens. The dead person, who recognizes the clear light as his or her own nature and remains with equanimity in that state, realizes what is known as the transference of consciousness into the reality dimension (*dharma^{kāya}*), that is, enlightenment without passing through the intermediate states.

Comment 8

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 29 in “*Introduction to the Clear Light of the Base*”)

First the earth element dissolves into the water element, or, stated differently, the flesh dissolves into the earth element: as an outer sign that the strength of the body is exhausted, you feel that you are falling into a pit, and that you are oppressed by heaviness as if crushed by a mountain;¹⁶ as an inner sign, your consciousness becomes drowsy and dull; as a secret sign, mirage-like visions arise.

Next the water element dissolves into the fire element, or, stated differently, warmth dissolves into the fire element: as outer signs, a small amount of fluid emerges from the mouth and nose, which become dry, and speech is impaired; as an inner sign, body warmth disappears, starting from the extremities, and consciousness becomes agitated;¹⁷ as a secret sign, a hazy smokelike vision arises.

Then the fire element dissolves into the air element: as an outer sign, bodily heat ceases; as inner signs, you no longer recognize people, and your sense faculties falter; as a secret sign, the mind alternates, flickering like a firefly, between moments of clarity

and vagueness.

Then respiration dissolves into the air element: as an outer sign, the ascending wind, the downward-clearing wind, the fire-accompanying wind, and the all-pervading wind gather into the life-sustaining wind. Because of this, inhalation is difficult. From the lungs, the breath flows into the esophagus and accumulates externally.

Then the air element dissolves into the consciousness: as an outer sign, respiration ceases; as an inner sign, bewildering visions arise; as a secret sign, pure awareness shines like a radiant lamp.

For practitioners with little experience of a spiritual path, it is said the most effective moment to practice the transference of consciousness is at the start of the dissolution process.

Comment 9

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 41 in “*Introduction to Recognizing the Intermediate State of Reality*”)

As stated in the “Introductory Commentary,” the days mentioned in the context of the intermediate state of reality refer to days of meditative stability or contemplation, that is, the time the manifestation of clear light has lasted. For those who have had experience of contemplation, this period lasts for a long time, during which, if recognition of the clear light takes place, liberation is attained. For those who lack this familiarity, the experience of clear light will last only a brief moment, and not recognizing it, the deceased will be caught in the next intermediate state.

Until the inner breath has ceased, the body of the deceased should not be moved. The disappearance of warmth from all parts of the body and the fading coloration of the skin indicate that the inner breath has ceased. The introduction to the intermediate state of reality should be given from the first day of that state. However, for average practitioners whose stability in the practice of the phases of generation and completion, and so on, cannot be ascertained, the introduction should be given from the very day of their death.

The section of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the

Intermediate States relative to the respective day of the intermediate state of reality should be read aloud clearly three times, or at least once. As the length of the days of the intermediate state of reality in terms of the duration of our days is uncertain, if the introduction is repeated, the deceased who do not attain liberation in one phase of the intermediate state will do so in another.

For those who had achieved stability in the calm state and those who had healthy energy channels, the experience of the clear light lasts longer. For wrong-minded persons and those who have unhealthy energy channels, this phase lasts no longer than a snap of the fingers. Most sutras and tantras state that those who have had meditative experience dwell in the state of clear light for three and a half days. During that time, persevere in giving the introduction to the clear light.

Comment 10

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 49 in “*The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality*,” “First Day”)

Thereafter, read the text of the Liberation through Wearing, extensive or brief, perform the burned food offering, the offering to the deceased, practice the Natural Liberation of Habitual Tendencies, recite the three invocations of the intermediate state, the Invocation for Good Conduct,¹⁸ the Invocation for Rebirth in Sukhāvatī,¹⁹ the Invocation for Rebirth on the Glorious Copper-colored Mountain,²⁰ extensive or brief, and auspicious verses.

Comment 11

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 50 in “*The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality*,” “Second Day”)

On the second day of the intermediate state of reality, the same person who read the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States in the presence of the corpse, or if the corpse was not present, sitting in the customary place of the deceased or

where he or she died, should perform the rite of summoning the consciousness of the deceased, with the effigy remaining in place for forty-nine days,²¹ or the rite called the Purification of the Deceased, extensive or brief.²² The Purification of the Deceased ideally should be repeated weekly for forty-nine days. Begin the second day by reciting three times the Invocation That Calls to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help; thereafter give the actual introduction.



The wheel of transmigration (Illustration Credit app2.1)



Avalokiteśvara ([Illustration Credit app2.2](#))

Comment 12

(“The Great Liberation through Hearing” note 54 in “The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality,” “Second Day”)

This is followed by the recitation of the text of the Liberation through Wearing, extensive or brief. It is also customary that relatives and friends offer foods to the deceased, preparing those the deceased liked best so that, satisfied, he or she severs attachments to the human world and is encouraged to depart to a

pure land. This is followed by the Practice of Natural Liberation of Habitual Tendencies and the invocations of the intermediate states, the recitation of the Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States, and the other invocations mentioned before.

Comment 13

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 55 in “*The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality*,” “Third Day”)

On the third day, the introduction should be preceded and ended as explained for the second day.

Comment 14

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 57 in “*The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality*,” “Fourth Day”)

On the fourth day, the introduction to Amitābha and the accompanying deities who have come to rescue the deceased is given. Since the fourth day roughly corresponds to the three-and-a-half-day period spoken of in most tantras, after which the deceased who have not recognized the clear light reawaken and enter the intermediate state of rebirth, it is said that it is important to recite the introduction to the intermediate state of rebirth from this day on throughout the remainder of the forty-nine-day cycle.

The duration of the stay in this intermediate state in terms of human time corresponds to seven days. During that period, if the dead person does not obtain a body, on the seventh day the being dies and is born again in the intermediate state, and this continues for generally a maximum of forty-nine days²³ when the secondary conditions for rebirth are met. Thus, the weekly performance of the Rite of Purification also serves to mitigate the suffering that beings undergo with each weekly death. During the first two intermediate states, it is difficult for ordinary people to gain recognition. Therefore, it is very important to recite

repeatedly the introduction to the intermediate state of rebirth.

Comment 15

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 77 in “*The Vision of the Peaceful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality*,” “*Seventh Day*”)

Until this point, recite the introduction to the peaceful deities of the intermediate state of reality.

Comment 16

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 84 in “*The Vision of the Wrathful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality*,” “*Twelfth Day*”)

On the twelfth day, Karma Heruka in union with his consort manifest together as the fifty-eight deities through the energy of the deceased’s own pure awareness and should be viewed with intense devotion as deities that have come to rescue the deceased on the long passage in the intermediate state. If these deities are invoked with intense devotion, all fears and terrors will vanish, and certainly liberation will be attained. Up to now, the visions of the peaceful and wrathful deities of the intermediate state of reality have been encountered during the twelve consecutive days of meditative stability explained previously.

Comment 17

(“*The Great Liberation through Hearing*” note 92 in “*Conclusion*”)

The introduction to the intermediate state of rebirth should be given, in accordance with the teaching of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, three times daily, every day from the tenth day onward until the forty-ninth day. Recited aloud with the correct pronunciation and clear diction, with compassion and the altruistic motivation to help, even if in life the dead person had been a hated enemy, this introduction

has measureless benefits.

Traditionally, between the introductions to the intermediate states of the moment of death, reality, and rebirth, various sutras, such as the Sutra of the Great Liberation,²⁴ the Sutra of the White Lotus,²⁵ the Hundred Thousand Names of the Buddha,²⁶ the Ocean of Invocations,²⁷ and the Diamond Sutra,²⁸ as well as other formulas of atonement, are recited. On the forty-ninth day, in connection with the practice of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, it is customary to perform the Rite of Liberation from the Six Realms,²⁹ a fire ritual in which the effigy is burned, and where a food offering is made to the deceased and a tantric offering ritual³⁰ is performed.

The rites traditionally performed and the invocations that can be recited vary considerably, depending on the specific Tibetan tradition followed, familiarity with or liking for certain rites and invocations, circumstances relating to the household of the deceased, and so on. These procedures are usually lengthy and complex, although simpler ways exist that are more suitable in a Western context to help the dying person on his or her journey after death, such as the condensed practices of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* that include the mantras that liberate upon hearing.

Appendix C

The Symbolism of the Mandala of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities

THE MANḌALA of the forty-two peaceful deities and fifty-eight wrathful deities found in the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* cycle, discovered by Karma Lingpa and to which the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States belongs, originally appears in the Guhyagarbha tantra and other Nyingmapa tantras as well. The maṇḍala and the deities portray the natural state of self-perfection of the individual. The peaceful deities represent the peaceful emptiness that is the primordial purity of the psychophysical aggregates, while the wrathful deities represent the manifestation of energy, equally indivisible from primordial purity.

In the spiritual practice of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, after the practitioner has transformed into Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva, the maṇḍala of the peaceful deities is visualized at the heart, the maṇḍala of the awareness holders at the throat, and the maṇḍala of the wrathful deities inside the skull. Each deity is associated with one of the wisdom energy channels in these three parts of the body. At the center of the maṇḍala of the peaceful deities is Vairocana, and at his heart are Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī in union. The position of these deities, as presented below, reflects the way they manifest externally in visions during the intermediate state of reality.

Pictorial representations of the peaceful and wrathful deities vary considerably in body color, implements, and facial characteristics. These differences reflect the variations in individual scriptures belonging to the transmitted precepts and hidden treasures or terma literature.¹ The descriptions that follow chiefly reflect those found in Karma Lingpa's cycle of the *Peaceful*

and Wrathful Deities, the iconographic details of which are specified in The Manner of Painting Deities in Thangkas.²

The symbolic aspects of the iconography are taken from the Immaculate Confession tantra, a tantra from the early translation period that describes the peaceful and wrathful deities and their symbolism in conjunction with instructions on restoring breaches in commitments before the mandalas of these deities.³ This tantra bears a particular relation to the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States since this collection of texts often includes the Natural Liberation through Words of Confession in the Presence of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities, a text that Padmasambhava extracted from the Immaculate Confession tantra that was later discovered as a terma by Karma Lingpa. This text and several commentaries to the Guhyagarbha tantra contained in the collection titled *Very Extensive Transmitted Precepts* are the other sources for the symbolism cited.

In the Western world, death is widely considered to be the denial of life, and as such it poses a threat to the established values of ordinary people. This may explain why its existence is concealed as much as possible. Moreover, the willful ignorance that surrounds death in the West leaves relatives and friends of the deceased in utter bewilderment. Their loved one is now just a lifeless body to be removed as quickly as possible for either cremation or burial. Relatives and friends begin to question the purpose of life and death, and understandably they are unable to find easy answers. Religious people follow the tradition of funerary rites in churches or temples, where officiating clergy do their best to alleviate the suffering of the relatives with kind words. After that, the family, alone in the house that once was shared with the physical and spiritual presence of the deceased, is left with a sense of emptiness that is difficult to fill.

The indications given in this text will benefit not only the deceased during the difficult passage through death and beyond, but also the bereaved family and friends. Although such a loss is always painful, the mourners, having performed these practices, will feel with some justice that they have done everything possible for their loved one, and their hearts will be at peace.

The Male and Female Primordial Buddhas

The union of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī symbolizes the indivisible union of self-originated wisdom and the expanse of reality or emptiness.

Deity: Samantabhadra (*kun tu bzang po*), Total Goodness

Color: radiant blue

Position: center

Gesture: meditation *mudrā*,⁴ symbolizing the knowledge that enlightened and unenlightened beings are the same

Seat: lotus flower, symbolizing freedom from conditioned phenomena

Symbolism: pure awareness of self-originated wisdom, the mind, and the doer

Deity: Samantabhadrī (*kun tu bzang mo*), Total Goodness

Color: radiant white

Position: center

Gesture: meditation mudrā, symbolizing the all-pervasiveness of existence⁵

Seat: lotus flower, symbolizing freedom from the stain of concrete attributes

Symbolism: emptiness, expanse of reality, the mind's objects, and actions

Although the attire of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī is not specified in the Great Liberation through Hearing, it is said that in the context of the peaceful and wrathful deities practice, Samantabhadra and Samantabhadrī are clad in sambhogakāya attire, albeit without implements.⁶ They embrace in union on a sun-and-moon disk on a throne supported by lions.

The Five Male Buddhas of the Five Families

Vairocana, Vajrasattva-Aksobhya,⁷ Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi symbolize the five wisdoms and the natural

purity of the five psychophysical aggregates. Each male buddha points his implement to the earth with his right hand and holds a bell in his left hand, with which he embraces his consort.

Deity: Vairocana (*rnam par snang mdzad*), Manifester of Form

Family: tathāgata

Color: radiant white, emanating brilliant blue light⁸

Position: center, embracing Ākāśadhātviśvarī

Attribute: eight-spoked wheel, symbolizing Vairocana as governor of all through the wisdom of the expanse of reality

Seat: fearless lion throne; lotus, sun, moon, and jewel disks

Symbolism: natural purity of the aggregate of form; nature of the body of all buddhas

Deity: Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva (*mi bskyod pa*), Imperturbable

Family: vajra

Color: blue, emanating brilliant white light

Position: east, embracing Buddhalocanā

Attribute: vajra, symbolizing freedom from the concept of birth, death, and change through mirrorlike wisdom

Seat: powerful elephant throne; lotus, sun, moon, and jewel disks

Symbolism: natural purity of the aggregate of consciousness; nature of the mind of all buddhas

Deity: Ratnasambhava (*rin chen 'byung gnas*), Jewel Mine

Family: ratna

Color: yellow, emanating brilliant yellow light

Position: south, embracing Māmakī

Attribute: blazing jewel, symbolizing Ratnasambhava as the source of all qualities through the wisdom of equality

Seat: supreme horse throne; lotus, sun, moon, and jewel disks

Symbolism: natural purity of the aggregate of feelings; nature of the qualities of all buddhas

Deity: Amitābha (*snang ba mtha' yas*), Boundless Light

Family: padma

Color: red, emanating brilliant red light

Position: west, embracing Pāñdaravāsinī

Attribute: eight-petaled lotus, symbolizing nonattachment to general and specific characteristics of things through discerning wisdom

Seat: splendid peacock throne; lotus, sun, moon, and jewel disks

Symbolism: natural purity of the aggregate of perception; nature of the voice of all buddhas

Deity: Amoghasiddhi (*don yod grub pa*), Unfailing Accomplishment

Family: karma

Color: green, emanating brilliant green light

Position: north, embracing Samayatārā

Attribute: double vajra, symbolizing perfected activities through action-accomplishing wisdom

Seat: Intelligent civamcivaka bird throne; lotus, sun, moon, and jewel disks

Symbolism: natural purity of the aggregate of volitions; nature of the activities of all buddhas

The Five Female Buddhas of the Five Families

Ākāśadhātvīśvarī, Buddhalocanā, Māmakī, Pāñdaravāsinī, and Samayatārā symbolize the natural purity of the five elements.

Deity: Ākāśadhātvīśvarī (*nam mkha'i dbyings phyug ma*), Queen of the Expanse of Space

Family: tathāgata

Color: white

Position: center, embracing Vairocana

Attribute: bell in her right hand, wheel in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the space element, and source of all buddhas of the three times

Deity: Buddhalocanā (*sangs rgyas spyan ma*), Eye of the Buddha

Family: vajra

Color: blue

Position: east, embracing Akṣobhya

Attribute: bell in her right hand, vajra in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the water element, and ground that produces all buddhas of the three times

Deity: Māmakī (*ma ma ki*), She Who Extinguishes Hatred

Family: ratna

Color: yellow

Position: south, embracing Ratnasambhava

Attribute: bell in her right hand, jewel in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the earth element, and holder of the qualities of all buddhas of the three times

Deity: Pāṇḍaravāsinī (*na bza' dkar mo/gos dkar mo*), Lady in White

Family: padma

Color: red

Position: west, embracing Amitābha

Attribute: bell in her right hand, eight-petaled lotus in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the fire element, and supreme voice of all buddhas of the three times

Deity: Samayatārā (*dam tshig sgrol ma*), Sacred Commitment Savior

Family: karma

Color: green

Position: north, embracing Amoghasiddhi

Attribute: bell in her right hand, double vajra on a lotus in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the air element, and liberator of all beings into the ten levels of bodhisattva realization

Distinct from the more frequent correlation and role, in the Great

Liberation through Hearing Buddhalocanā is associated with the water element and is the consort of Akṣobhya, whereas Māmakī is associated with the earth element and is the consort of Ratnasambhava. Each female buddha holds at her heart the same symbol in her left hand as the male buddha and holds a bell in her right hand, which embraces the male. Paintings often depict the female buddhas embracing the neck of the male with both hands.

The Eight Male Bodhisattvas

Kṣitigarbha, Maitreya, Samantabhadra, Ākāśagarbha, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Nīvāraṇaviśkambhin, and Vajrapāṇi symbolize the four sense consciousnesses and the related sense organs.

Deity: Kṣitigarbha (*sa'i snying po*), Essence of the Earth

Family: vajra

Color: white

Position: east, to the right of Akṣobhya

Attribute: a sprouting jewel that matures all beings into the unsurpassable state⁹

Symbolism: natural purity of visual consciousness

Deity: Maitreya (*byams pa*), Love

Family: vajra

Color: white

Position: east, to the left of Akṣobhya

Attribute: *nāgavṛkṣa* branch,¹⁰ with a wreath, symbolizing victory over the torment of the emotions

Symbolism: natural purity of the eye sense organ

Deity: Samantabhadra (*kun tu bzang po*), Total Goodness

Family: ratna

Color: yellow

Position: south, to the left of Ratnasambhava

Attribute: cluster of jewels, symbolizing the fulfillment of wishes and needs through the natural purity of the emotions

Symbolism: natural purity of the nose sense organ

Deity: Ākāśagarbha (*nam mkha'i snying po*), Essence of Space

Family: ratna

Color: yellow

Position: south, to the left of Ratnasambhava

Attribute: sword, symbolizing the severance of the flow of emotions

Symbolism: natural purity of ear consciousness

Deity: Avalokiteśvara (*spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug*), All-seeing Lord

Family: padma

Color: red

Position: west, to the right of Amitābha

Attribute: white lotus, symbolizing freedom from the stain of emotions

Symbolism: natural purity of nasal consciousness

Deity: Mañjuśrī (*'jam dpal dbyangs*), Gentle Melodious Splendor

Family: padma

Color: red

Position: west, to the left of Amitābha

Attribute: blue lotus flower,¹¹ symbolizing the exquisite beauty of freedom from the pain of emotions

Symbolism: natural purity of the tongue sense organ

Deity: Nivāraṇaviśkambhin (*sgrib pa rnam sel*), Completely Purified of Defilements

Family: karma

Color: green

Position: north, to the right of Amoghasiddhi

Attribute: volume of scriptures, symbolizing the knowledge that emotions are reality itself

Symbolism: natural purity of the ear sense organ

Deity: Vajrapāṇi (*phyag na rdo rje*), Vajra Holder

Family: karma

Color: green

Position: north, to the left of Amoghasiddhi

Attribute: vajra, symbolizing overcoming all emotions

Symbolism: natural purity of tongue consciousness

From another perspective, the eight male bodhisattvas symbolize the purity of the eight consciousnesses.¹² Each male bodhisattva holds an implement in his right hand and a bell in his left hand that rests on his hip. As a symbol that the activities for the benefit of beings have not been completed, each sits with loosely crossed legs on a seat consisting of lotus, sun, and moon disks, with his right leg slightly extended.

The Eight Female Bodhisattvas

Vajra Lāsyā, Vajra Puṣpā, Vajra Mālyā, Vajra Dhūpā, Vajra Gītā, Vajra Ālokā, Vajra Gandhā, and Vajra Nartī symbolize the natural purity of the four sense objects and of the four times.

Deity: Lāsyā (*sgeg mo ma*), Goddess of Gracefulness

Family: vajra

Color: white

Position: east, in front of Akṣobhya

Attribute: mirror

Symbolism: natural purity of visual form

Deity: Puṣpā (*me tog ma*), Goddess of Flowers

Family: vajra

Color: white

Position: east, behind Akṣobhya

Attribute: flower

Symbolism: natural purity of the past

Deity: Mālyā (*phreng ba ma*), Goddess of Garlands

Family: ratna

Color: yellow

Position: south, in front of Ratnasambhava

Attribute: garland¹³

Symbolism: natural purity of indefinite time

Deity: Dhūpā (*bdug spos ma/spos me ma*), Goddess of Incense

Family: ratna

Color: yellow

Position: south, behind Ratnasambhava

Attribute: incense burner

Symbolism: natural purity of smell

Deity: Gītā (*sgra dbyangs ma*), Goddess of Harmony

Family: padma

Color: red

Position: west, in front of Amitābha

Attribute: lute

Symbolism: natural purity of sound

Deity: Ālokā (*mar me ma*), Goddess of the Lamp

Family: padma

Color: red

Position: west, behind Amitābha

Attribute: butter lamp

Symbolism: natural purity of the future

Deity: Gandhā (*dri chab ma*), Goddess of Perfume

Family: karma

Color: green

Position: north, in front of Amoghasiddhi

Attribute: conch shell brimming with perfume

Symbolism: natural purity of the present

Deity: Nartī (*gar ma*), Goddess of Dance

Family: karma

Color: green

Position: north, behind Amoghasiddhi

Attribute: food

Symbolism: natural purity of taste

With the right hand, each female bodhisattva offers her attribute to the male and female buddhas to whose entourage she belongs. Each holds a bell in her left hand at her hip. As a symbol that the activities for the benefit of beings have not been completed, each sits with half-crossed legs on a seat consisting of lotus, sun, and moon disks, with her left leg slightly extended.¹⁴ All the peaceful deities are adorned with ornaments of the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment (*sambhogakāya*). Their hair is tied up in three jewel-adorned topknots, with five tresses falling over each shoulder.

The Four Male Gatekeepers

Trailokyavijaya, Yamāntaka, Hayagrīva, and Amṛtakundalīn symbolize the natural purity of the bodily sense faculty, bodily contact, tactile objects, and tactile consciousness as well as the natural purity of the four immeasurable aspirations.

Deity: Trailokyavijaya (*khams gsum rnam rgyal*), Victorious Conqueror of the Three Realms

Family: vajra

Color: white

Position: eastern gate, embracing Aṇkuśā

Attribute: vajra, symbolizing destruction arising from compassion for the welfare of beings (immeasurable compassion)

Symbolism: natural purity of the bodily sense faculty

Deity: Yamāntaka (*gshin rje gshed*), Destroyer of Death

Family: ratna

Color: yellow

Position: southern gate, embracing Pāśā

Attribute: human-headed cobra, symbolizing destruction arising from love for the welfare of beings (immeasurable love)

Symbolism: natural purity of bodily contact

Deity: Hayagrīva (*rta mgin*), Horse-headed One

Family: padma

Color: red

Position: western gate, embracing Sphoṭā

Attribute: club entwined with a snake, symbolizing destruction arising from joy for the welfare of beings (immeasurable joy)

Symbolism: natural purity of objects

Deity: Amṛtakuṇḍalīn (*bdud rtsi 'khyil ba*), Spiral of Nectar

Family: karma

Color: green

Position: northern gate, embracing Ghaṇṭā

Attribute: double vajra, symbolizing destruction arising from great equanimity for the welfare of beings (immeasurable equanimity)¹⁵

Symbolism: natural purity of tactile consciousness

The description of the attributes given here originates in the Immaculate Confession tantra. In some iconographic sources, Trailokyavijaya holds a hook and a staff surmounted by a human head in his right hand, while Yamāntaka holds a noose, Hayagrīva a chain, and Amṛtakuṇḍalīn a bell. Variations in these details are found in other peaceful and wrathful deities (zhitro) practices. All the male gatekeepers have one face and two arms and are depicted in a wrathful stance on a sun disk.

The Four Female Gatekeepers

Ankuśā, Pāśā, Sphoṭā, and Ghaṇṭā, who embody the four means

of attracting disciples and the four immeasurable aspirations, symbolize the natural purity of the four extreme views.

Deity: Aṅkuśā (*lcags kyu ma*), Iron Hook

Family: vajra

Color: white

Position: eastern gate, embracing Trailokyavijaya

Attribute: hook, symbolizing attracting disciples with generosity and compassion

Symbolism: natural purity of the view of eternalism

Deity: Pāśā (*zhags pa ma*), Noose

Family: ratna

Color: yellow

Position: southern gate, embracing Yamāntaka

Attribute: noose, symbolizing attracting disciples with spiritual practice and love

Symbolism: natural purity of the view of nihilism

Deity: Sphoṭā (*lcags sgrog ma*), Iron Chain

Family: padma

Color: red

Position: western gate, embracing Hayagrīva

Attribute: chain, symbolizing attracting disciples with harmonious conduct and joy

Symbolism: natural purity of the view of the self

Deity: Ghaṇṭā (*dril bu ma*), Bell

Family: karma

Color: green

Position: northern gate, embracing Amṛtakunḍalīn

Attribute: bell, symbolizing attracting disciples with pleasing speech and equanimity¹⁶

Symbolism: natural purity of the view of concrete characteristics

In some iconographic descriptions, the female gatekeepers hold a skull cup to the heart of the males with their left hand. The male and female gatekeepers are ferocious and terrifying, their hair rising upward, their heads ornamented with a tiara of five dried skulls representing the five families, and five billowing scarves symbolizing the five wisdoms. Bone and jewel ornaments adorn their bodies. They stand relaxed, in union, the males in the hero stance, the females with one leg extended and the other bent, on a sun disk amid blazing flames.

The Six Sages

Indraśakra, Vemacitra, Śākyamuni, Sthirasimha, Jvālamukha, and Yama Dharmarāja symbolize the natural purity of the worldly views and of the six emotions of the beings of the six realms.

Deity: Indraśakra (*dbang po brgya byin*), The Mighty One

Color: white

Position: zenith

Attribute: many-stringed lute, symbolizing the action of overcoming pride with the sound of the teaching of the four noble truths (liberates the god realm)

Symbolism: the natural purity of pride

Deity: Vemacitra (*thag bzang ris*), Coat of Mail

Color: green

Position: southeast

Attribute: armor and weapons, symbolizing the action of overcoming envy with patience (liberates the demigod realm)

Symbolism: the natural purity of envy

Deity: Śākyamuni (*sha kya thub pa/sha kya seng ge*), Sage of the Shakyas

Color: yellow

Position: southwest

Attribute: walking stick in his right hand, begging bowl in his left hand, symbolizing the action of overcoming attachment

with the path of nonattachment (liberates the human realm)

Symbolism: the natural purity of attachment

Deity: Sthirasimha (*seng ge rab brtan*), Staunch Lion

Color: blue

Position: northwest

Attribute: volume of scriptures, symbolizing the action of teaching that dispels ignorance (liberates the animal realm)

Symbolism: the natural purity of ignorance

Deity: Jvālamukha (*kha 'bar de ba*), Flaming Mouth

Color: red

Position: northeast

Attribute: jewel casket, symbolizing the action of purifying miserliness by eliminating hunger and thirst (liberates the hungry ghost realm)

Symbolism: the natural purity of miserliness

Deity: Yama Dharmarāja (*gshin rje chos kyi rgyal po*), Dharmarāja, Lord of Death

Color: black

Position: nadir

Attribute: fire and water, symbolizing the action of purifying aversion by explaining the defects of water and fire (liberates the hell realm)¹⁷

Symbolism: the natural purity of aversion

The six sages are depicted in various positions, depending on the style of pictorial composition, surrounding or close to Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri in union as the central figures of the maṇḍala of the peaceful deities in the Great Liberation through Hearing. Each holds his characteristic symbol in his right hand and a bell in his left hand. All six sages have the major and minor signs of the nirmāṇakāya or emanation body, such as a crown protuberance and wheel-like designs adorning the soles of the feet. Referred to as the six emanations that tame beings, they stand on lotus disks, symbolizing their unwavering

dedication to the welfare of sentient beings.

THE AWARENESS HOLDERS

The awareness holders or rigdzins¹⁸ symbolize the supreme practitioners dwelling on different levels of realization.

Deity: Padmanarteshvara¹⁹ (*rnam par smin pa'i rig 'dzin*), Awareness-holder of Complete Maturation

Color: five colors

Position: center, embracing a red dākinī

Deity: *sa la gnas pa'i rig 'dzin*, Awareness holder Who Dwells on the Levels of Realization

Color: white

Position: east, embracing a white dākinī

Deity: *tshe la dbang pa'i rig 'dzin*, Awareness-holder of Mastery over Lifespan

Color: yellow

Position: south, embracing a yellow dākinī

Deity: *phyag rgya chen po'i rig 'dzin*, Awareness-holder of the Great Symbol

Color: red

Position: west, embracing a red dākinī

Deity: *lhun gyis grub pa' i rig 'dzin*, Awareness-holder of Self-perfection

Color: green

Position: north, embracing a green dākinī

In most practices of the peaceful and wrathful deities, the central figure in the mandala of the awareness holders is called Padmavajra and is red in color. Sometimes the awareness holders are represented as dancing, standing with the right leg raised, and sometimes with both feet on the ground, with a curved knife

in the right hand and a blood-filled skull cup in the left. They are embraced by their consorts, who are of the same color as their male counterparts, hold the same implements, and clasp the waist of the male with either one or both legs.

THE FIFTY-EIGHT WRATHFUL DEITIES

The Six Wrathful Herukas

In the intermediate state of the wrathful deities, the male primordial buddha Samantabhadra and the five peaceful male buddhas (Vairocana, Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi) manifest as Mahottara Heruka and Buddha Heruka, Vajra Heruka, Ratna Heruka, Padma Heruka, and Karma Heruka, respectively, symbolizing the five emotions as skillful means.

Deity: Mahottara Heruka²⁰ (*che mchog he ru ka*), Supreme Heruka

Color: blackish brown; right face is white, left face is red, central face is blackish brown

Position: center, embracing Krodheśvarī

Attributes: three right hands hold a five-pronged vajra, a khaṭvāṅga, and a small drum; three left hands hold a bell, a blood-filled skull cup, and a noose made of intestines

Symbolism: unified glory of all buddhas

Deity: Buddha Heruka²¹

Family: tathāgata

Color: blackish brown; right face is white, left face is red, central face is blackish brown

Position: center, embracing Buddha Krodheśvarī

Attributes: three right hands hold a wheel, a battle ax, and a sword; three left hands hold a bell, a plow, and a blood-filled skull cup

Symbolism: ability in the skillful means of great ignorance, the wisdom of the expanse of reality

Deity: Vajra Heruka

Family: vajra

Color: blackish blue; right face is white, left face is red, and central face is blackish blue

Position: east, embracing Vajra Krodheśvarī

Attributes: three right hands hold a vajra, a blood-filled skull cup, and a battle ax; three left hands hold a bell, a blood-filled skull cup, and a plow

Symbolism: ability in the skillful means of great anger, the mirrorlike wisdom

Deity: Ratna Heruka

Family: ratna

Color: blackish yellow; right face is white, left face is red, and central face is blackish yellow

Position: south, embracing Ratna Krodheśvarī

Attributes: three right hands hold a jewel, a khaṭvāṅga, and a mace; three left hands hold a bell, a blood-filled skull cup, and a trident

Symbolism: ability in the skillful means of great pride, the wisdom of equality

Deity: Padma Heruka

Family: padma

Color: blackish red; right face is white, left face is blue, and central face is blackish red

Position: west, embracing Padma Krodheśvarī

Attributes: three right hands hold a lotus, a khaṭvāṅga, and a club; three left hands hold a bell, a blood-filled skull cup, and a small drum

Symbolism: ability in the skillful means of great attachment, the wisdom of discernment

Deity: Karma Heruka

Family: karma

Color: blackish green; right face is white, left face is red, central

face is blackish green

Position: north, embracing Karma Krodheśvarī

Attributes: three right hands hold a sword, a khaṭvāṅga, and a club;²² three left hands hold a bell, a blood-filled skull cup, and a plow

Symbolism: ability in the skillful means of great envy, the wisdom of accomplishing actions

All the male herukas have three faces, six arms, and four legs. They are majestic and adorned with charnel-ground ornaments. They stand in union with their consorts in the hero stance, legs apart, right leg drawn back, and left leg extended, on a jewel, lotus, moon, and sun disk.²³

The Six Wrathful Consorts

In the intermediate state of the wrathful deities, the female primordial buddha Samantabhadri and the five peaceful female buddhas (Ākāśadhātvīśvarī, Buddhalocanā, Māmakī, Pāṇḍaravāsinī, and Samayatārā) manifest as Krodheśvarī and Buddha Krodheśvarī, Vajra Krodheśvarī, Ratna Krodheśvarī, Padma Krodheśvarī, and Karma Krodheśvarī, respectively, symbolizing the purity of the six sense objects.

All the consorts of the herukas have one face and two hands; each embraces the neck of the heruka with her right hand, which holds her attribute, and offers him a blood-filled skull cup with her left hand. Each consort wears a newly flayed leopard-skin skirt and stands in union with the heruka, with her left leg clasping his waist and her right leg extended.

Deity: Krodheśvarī

Color: blackish-brown

Position: center, embracing Mahottara Heruka

Attribute: vajra

Symbolism: natural purity of the field of phenomena

Deity: Buddha Krodheśvarī

Family: tathāgata

Color: blackish-red

Position: center, embracing Buddha Heruka

Attribute: wheel

Symbolism: natural purity of objects of sight

Deity: Vajra Krodheśvarī

Family: vajra

Color: blackish-blue

Position: east, embracing Vajra Heruka

Attribute: vajra

Symbolism: natural purity of objects of hearing

Deity: Ratna Krodheśvarī

Family: ratna

Color: blackish-yellow

Position: south, embracing Ratna Heruka

Attribute: jewel

Symbolism: natural purity of objects of smell

Deity: Padma Krodheśvarī

Family: padma

Color: blackish-red

Position: west, embracing Padma Heruka

Attribute: lotus

Symbolism: natural purity of objects of taste

Deity: Karma Krodheśvarī

Family: karma

Color: blackish-green

Position: north, embracing Karma Heruka

Attribute: double vajra

Symbolism: natural purity of objects of touch

The Eight Gauri

Gaurī, Caurī, Pramohā, Vetālī, Pukkasī, Ghasmarī, Caṇḍālī, and Smaśānī symbolize the natural purity of the four sense consciousnesses and the four sense organs.

Deity: Gaurī (*ke'u ri*)

Color: white

Position: east

Attribute: a club (symbol of the purity of the five emotions and the destruction of the five contaminated aggregates) in her right hand, and a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the visual consciousness, and pacifying activities

Deity: Caurī (*tso'u ri*)

Color: yellow

Position: south

Attribute: a bow and arrow, method and insight (symbol of the gathering and conferring of all qualities)

Symbolism: natural purity of the aural consciousness, and subjugating activities

Deity: Pramohā (*pra mo ha*)

Color: red

Position: west

Attribute: a crocodile victory banner (symbol of generating compassion in others through speech, and of victory over the two extremes) in her right hand, and a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the olfactory consciousness, and pacifying activities

Deity: Vetālī (*be ta li*)

Color: black²⁴

Position: north

Attribute: a vajra (symbol of unifying the three worlds into

wisdom) in her right hand, and a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the gustatory consciousness, and wrathful activities

Deity: Pukkasi (*pu kka si/pu ka si*)

Color: reddish-yellow

Position: southeast

Attribute: entrails (symbol of liberating beings) in her right hand, devouring them with her left hand

Symbolism: natural purity of the eye organ, and enriching activities

Deity: Ghasmarī (*kasma ri*)

Color: blackish-green²⁵

Position: southwest

Attribute: a vajra (symbol of liberating beings from the three realms) in her right hand stirs a blood-filled skull cup held to her mouth by her left hand, as she eagerly drinks.

Symbolism: natural purity of the ear organ, and wrathful activities

Deity: Caṇḍālī (*gtum mo*)

Color: pale yellow

Position: northwest

Attribute: tearing the head off a body, holding the heart in her right hand, and eating the body with her left hand (symbol of purifying the three realms at the root)

Symbolism: natural purity of the olfactory organ, and life-increasing activities

Deity: Smaśānī (*dur khrod ma*)

Color: blackish-blue

Position: northeast

Attribute: tearing the head off a body and devouring it (symbol of cutting the root of cyclic existence)²⁶

Symbolism: natural purity of the gustatory organ, and activities of many kinds²⁷

The eight gaurī or mātarah²⁸ encircle the five main herukas and their consorts. The first four form the inner circle in the cardinal directions, and the last four form an outer circle in the intermediate directions. They have one face, two arms, and three eyes, wide open mouths with bared fangs, and yellow hair that rises upward. They are naked and adorned with charnel-ground attire. Their arms and legs are in a dancing position as they dance on the corpse of an adult, and they wear a diadem of dry skulls symbolizing the five buddha families, a garland of skulls, five types of bone ornaments, a vest made of human skin, and a leopard-skin skirt.²⁹

The Eight Pishaci

Simhamukhī, Vyāghrimukhī, Śṛgālamukhī, Shvānamukhī, Grdhramukhī, Kaṇkamukhī, Kākamukhī, and Ulūkamukhī symbolize the natural purity of the objects of the senses and of the four times.

Deity: Simhamukhī (*seng gdong ma*), Lion Face

Color: blackish-brown

Head: lion

Position: east

Attributes:³⁰ hands crossed over her chest, carrying a corpse in her mouth (symbol of nonseparation from cyclic existence out of compassion), and shaking her mane

Symbolism: natural purity of visual objects, and the action of overwhelming others

Deity: Vyāghrimukhī (*stag gdong ma*), Tiger Face

Color: red

Head: tiger

Position: south

Attributes: arms crossed (symbol of environment and beings

manifesting as wisdom), staring with bulging eyes and snarling

Symbolism: natural purity of sounds, and the action of heroic wrath

Deity: Śṛgālamukhī (*wa yi gdong ma*), Fox Face

Color: black

Head: fox

Position: west

Attributes: a razor in her right hand and entrails in her left hand, devouring the entrails and licking the blood (symbol of purifying the most subtle cognitive impediments)

Symbolism: natural purity of odors, purifying the demon of the body with skillful means

Deity: Shvānamukhī (*spyang ki gdong ma*), Wolf Face

Color: blackish-blue

Head: wolf

Position: north

Attributes: tearing apart a corpse with her two hands, staring with bulging eyes (symbol of seeing reality while abiding in duality)

Symbolism: natural purity of taste, overcoming the demon of self-complacency

Deity: Gr̥dhamukhī (*bya rgod gdong ma*), Vulture Face

Color: whitish-yellow

Head: vulture

Position: southeast

Attributes: a corpse of an adult human over her shoulders, holding a skeleton in her hands (symbol of liberating beings from cyclic existence)

Symbolism: natural purity of the past, and unobstructed knowledge

Deity: Kaṇkamukhī (*dur bya'i gdong ma*), Kangka Face

Color: blackish-red

Head: kangka bird

Position: southwest

Attributes: a corpse of an adult human over her shoulders (symbol of voluntarily accepting cyclic existence)

Symbolism: natural purity of the future, and voluntarily accepting cyclic existence

Deity: Kākamukhī (*bya rog gdong ma*), Crow Face

Color: black

Head: crow

Position: northwest

Attributes: a sword in her right hand and a skull in her left hand, devouring a human heart and lungs (symbol of having realized the three enlightened dimensions and having cut the root of cyclic existence)

Symbolism: natural purity of the present

Deity: Ulūkamukhī (*ug lu'i gdong ma*), Owl Face

Color: blackish-blue

Head: owl

Position: northeast

Attributes: a vajra in her right hand, wielding a sword in her left hand, and eating flesh (symbols of purifying cyclic existence)³¹

Symbolism: natural purity of timeless time,³² and the nonrejection of lesser beings

The eight piśācī encircle the five main herukas and their consorts. The first four, in the cardinal directions, are known as the four fanged ones, and the last four, in the intermediate directions, as the four winged ones. The last four grind their vajra beaks and emit sounds with their palates.³³ Each wears a garland of fresh human heads and stands on a single corpse of an adult human. With their bodies flailing and arms outstretched, they move in a bizarre dance; those to the right have their right leg extended, and those to the left, the left leg.

The Four Female Gatekeepers

In the intermediate state of the wrathful deities, Aṇkuśā, Pāśā, Sphoṭā, and Ghaṇṭā manifest as Vajratejasī, Vajrāmoghā, Vajralokā, and Vajravetālī, symbolizing various activities.³⁴

Deity: Vajratejasī/Aṇkuśā (*rdo rje sruṇi 'gro ma/rta gdong ma*)

Color: white

Head: horse

Position: east

Attribute: a hook in her right hand, and a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

Symbolism: the compassion that does not rest until all beings are realized

Deity: Vajrāmoghā/ Pāśā (*rdo rje gdong mo/phag gdong ma*)

Color: yellow

Head: sow

Position: south

Attribute: a noose in her right hand, and a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

Symbolism: the undeviating and inexorable activities that sever the coarse emotions of beings

Deity: Vajralokā/Sphoṭā (*rdo rje ḍjig rten ma/seng gdong ma*)

Color: red

Head: lion

Position: west

Attribute: an iron chain in her right hand, and a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

Symbolism: the yogic retaining of vital energy within the reliquary of the vital essences of the sun and moon

Deity: Vajravetālī/Ghaṇṭā (*rdo rje ro langs ma/sprul gdong ma*)

Color: green

Head: snake

Position: north

Attribute: a bell in her right hand, and a blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

Symbolism: control over the life span³⁵

The four female gatekeepers³⁶ wear tiger-skin skirts. Those on the right have their right leg extended; those on the left, the left leg extended.³⁷ In the section on the vision of the wrathful deities in the intermediate state of reality of the Great Liberation through Hearing, the names of these four deities are the same as those of the four female gatekeepers mentioned among the peaceful deities (Ankuśā, Pāśā, Sphoṭā, and Ghaṇṭā).

The Twenty-Eight Ishvari

The twenty-eight īśvarī consist of four groups of six yoginīs each plus four gatekeepers, symbolizing the enactment of the four kinds of activity.

East: Six Yoginīs of the Vajra Family Symbolizing Pacifying Activity

Deity: Manurākṣasī

Color: blackish-brown³⁸

Head: yak

Attributes: vajra in her right hand, blood-filled skull cup in the her hand

Deity: Brahmāṇī

Color: yellowish-red³⁹

Head: snake

Attributes: vajra in her right hand, lotus in her left hand

Deity: Raudrī

Color: blackish-green

Head: leopard

Attributes: vajra in her right hand, trident in her left hand

Deity: Vaisṇāvī

Color: blue⁴⁰

Head: weasel⁴¹

Attributes: vajra in her right hand, wheel in her left hand

Deity: Kaumārī

Color: red⁴²

Head: brown bear

Attributes: vajra in her right hand, lance in her left hand

Deity: Indrāṇī

Color: white

Head: black bear

Attributes: vajra in her right hand, noose made of entrails in her left hand

South: Six Yoginīs of the Ratna Family Symbolizing Increasing Activity

Deity: Vajrā

Color: yellow

Head: bat

Attributes: jewel in her right hand, razor in her left hand

Deity: Śāntī

Color: red⁴³

Head: crocodile

Attributes: jewel in her right hand, vase in her left hand

Deity: Amṛta

Color: red⁴⁴

Head: scorpion

Attributes: jewel in her right hand, lotus in her left hand

Deity: Saumī

Color: white⁴⁵

Head: hawk⁴⁶

Attributes: jewel in her right hand, vajra in her left hand

Deity: Dandanī

Color: blackish-green⁴⁷

Head: fox

Attributes: jewel in her right hand, club in her left hand

Deity: Rākṣasī

Color: blackish-yellow

Head: tiger

Attributes: jewel in her right hand, blood-filled skull cup in her left hand

West: Six Yoginīs of the Padma Family Symbolizing Subjugating Activity

Deity: Bhakṣasī

Color: blackish-green⁴⁸

Head: vulture

Attributes: lotus in her right hand, mace in her left hand

Deity: Rati

Color: red

Head: horse

Attributes: lotus in her right hand, human torso in her left hand

Deity: Rudhiramadī

Color: white⁴⁹

Head: garuḍa

Attributes: lotus in her right hand, club in her left hand

Deity: Ekacāriṇī Rākṣasī

Color: red

Head: dog

Attributes: lotus in her right hand, vajra razor in her left hand

Deity: Manohārikā

Color: red

Head: hoopoe

Attributes: lotus in her right hand, shooting an arrow with a bow in her left hand

Deity: Siddhikarī

Color: greenish-red

Head: deer

Attributes: lotus in her right hand, treasure vase in her left hand

North: Six Yoginīs of the Karma Family Symbolizing Wrathful, Destructive Activity

Deity: Vāyudevī

Color: blue⁵⁰

Head: wolf

Attributes: double vajra in her right hand, insignia in her left hand

Deity: Agnāyī

Color: red⁵¹

Head: ibex

Attributes: double vajra in her right hand, glowing firebrand in her left hand

Deity: Vārāhī

Color: black⁵²

Head: sow

Attributes: double vajra in her right hand, noose made of fangs in her left hand

Deity: Cāmuṇḍī

Color: red⁵³

Head: crow

Attributes: double vajra in her right hand, child's corpse in her left hand

Deity: Bhujanā

Color: blackish-green

Head: elephant

Attributes: double vajra in her right hand, holding a corpse and drinking blood from a skull cup in her left hand

Deity: Varunāñī

Color: blue⁵⁴

Head: snake

Attributes: double vajra in her right hand, a noose made of snakes in her left hand

The Four Yogini Gatekeepers

Deity: Vajra Mahākālī

Color: white

Head: cuckoo

Position: east

Attributes: vajra in her right hand, iron hook in her left hand

Deity: Vajra Mahāchāgalā

Color: yellow

Head: goat

Position: south

Attributes: jewel in her right hand, noose in her left hand

Deity: Vajra Mahākumbhakarṇī

Color: red

Head: lion

Position: west

Attributes: lotus in her right hand, iron chain in her left hand

Deity: Vajra Lambodarā

Color: blackish-green

Head: snake

Position: north

Attributes: double vajra in her right hand, bell in her left hand

The twenty-eight īśvarī and the four yoginī gatekeepers surround the thirty wrathful deities in the specified positions.

Notes

Preface

1. *zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol*. The term *zhi khro*, frequently used in the phonetic spellings *zhitro*, *shitro*, or *xitro* in Western literature on the subject, refers to the peaceful (*zhi ba*) and wrathful (*khro bo*) deities visualized in the intermediate states.
2. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, ed. *Il Libro Tibetano dei Morti* (Rome: Newton Compton, 2007); first published in 1983.
3. Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *Birth, Life and Death* (Arcidosso, Italy: Shang Shung Publications, 2008).
4. Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Or, The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering* (Oxford, UK, and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); first published in 1927.
5. Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo by Guru Rinpoche according to Karma Lingpa* (Boston: Shambhala, 2003); first published in 1975.
6. Robert Thurman, trans. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Book of Natural Liberation through Understanding in the Between* (New York: Bantam, 1993).
7. Graham Coleman and Thupten Jinpa, eds., Gyurme Dorje, trans., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First Complete Translation, 1st American Edition* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007); first published in the United Kingdom in 2005.
8. Padmasambhava, the principal protagonist in the introduction and initial dissemination of Buddhism in

Tibet during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (*khri strong lde btsan*, 730 or 742–796? or 797), was the founder and inspiration of the first Buddhist school in Tibet, now known as the Nyingma or Ancient tradition.

9. Some believe Odḍiyāna was located in northwestern India, in what is today Pakistan's Swat valley.
10. In Dzogchen, the word *tantra* (*rgyud*) refers to the fundamental scriptures that contain the teachings related to the base, path, and fruit. The explanations of the profound methods and instructions that the great masters of knowledge or rigdzins (*rig 'dzin*) have extracted from the tantras are known as crucial (*lung*), while those known as esoteric (*mang ngag*, Sanskrit: *upadeśa*) are essential pointers that are the fruit of the contemplative experience of expert practitioners based on the tantras and on the crucial teachings.
11. See “Introduction” note 4.
12. See note 8 above.
13. *kar ma gling pa*, born in a town called Khyerdrup (*khyer grup*) in eastern Dagpo circa 1350.
14. *cog ro klu'i rgyal mtshan* (eighth century), an important translator at the court of Trisong Detsen (see note 8 above).
15. *zhwa dmar mkha' spyod dbang po* (1350–1405), the red-crowned lama.
16. Kagyü (*bka' brgyud*) and Nyingma (*rnying ma*): two of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism; the other two are Sakya (*sa skya*) and Gelug (*dge lugs*). The Nyingma (Ancient) tradition drew inspiration directly from the teachings of Padmasambhava during the first diffusion of Buddhism in eighth-century Tibet. The other three schools were founded during the second diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet in the tenth and eleventh centuries in an atmosphere of alignment with the Indian tradition.

In particular, the Kagyü school relied on the doctrines promulgated by two Indian masters, Tilopa and Naropa, transmitted in Tibet by Marpa (*mar pa*, 1012–1097 or 1099) and Milarepa (*mi la ras pa*, 1040–1123 or 1052–1135). The

Sakya (literally “gray-colored land,” named after the place where the first monastery of that order was built) dedicated themselves to the teaching of the ninth-century *mahasiddha* Virūpa, whereas the Gelug (literally “virtuous tradition”) were most directly influenced by the teaching of the Indian pandit Atīśa (972/982–1054) and the celebrated scholar and translator Rinchen Zangpo (*rin chen bzang po*, 958–1055), the main proponents of this second diffusion.

17. *sgam po pa* (1079–1153). With Rechungpa (*ras chung pa*, 1083 or 1084–1161), one of the two main disciples of Milarepa.
18. *sgam po gdar*, a mountain north of the Kagyü monastery of Daglha Gampo (*dwags lha sgam po*) in the southeastern region of Dagpo (*dwags po*).
19. *shog ser*. Occasionally the hidden treasures discovered are yellow scrolls bearing symbolic scripts, obtained from rocks, and so on, or received directly by treasure finders in magical ways. When deciphered, the script or lettering of the yellow scroll becomes a key for awakening the recollection of a teaching hidden in the mind of the treasure finder. Sometimes the script or letters appear directly in the mind of the tertön.
20. *long po*, a district in the Kongpo (*kong po*) region of southern Tibet.
21. *rgya ra ba nam mkha' chos kyi rgya mtsho* (1430–?). It is said that Nyida Öser also passed on the lineage of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* to Sangye Drime (*sang rgyas dri med*, dates unknown), a lineage that eventually extended to the Fifth Dalai Lama.
22. *rat na gling pa* (1403–1479). Ratna Lingpa, born in Lhodrag (*lho brag*), southern Tibet, had visions of Padmasambhava from early childhood. When this tertön was twenty-seven, he experienced an apparition in which an ascetic handed him a list of the hidden treasure teachings he was destined to bring to light, with instructions on how to find them. All his spiritual activities were accompanied by extraordinary occurrences, such as unusual rainbow formations and rainfalls of flowers.

Besides propagating his own termas, he endeavored to collect and preserve the Nyingma tantras.

23. *kun dga' dpal 'byor* (1428–1476), an incarnation of the first Drugchen Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorje (*'brug chen gtsang pa rgya ras ye shes rdo rje*, 1161–1211) and the head of the Drugpa Kagyü school at that time. Among his students figure the so-called three divine madmen, namely Tsangnyon Heruka (*gtsang smyon he ru ka*, 1452–1507), Ünyon Kunga Zangpo (*dbus smyon kun dga' bzang po*, 1452–1507), and Drug Myon Kunga Legpa (*'brug smyon kun dga' legs pa*, 1455–1529), as well as the great accomplished master, the bridge builder, Thangthong Gyalpo (*thang stong rgyal po*, 1361–1485).
24. *rin chen baidurya phreng ba*. Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (*'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas*, 1813–1899) was a highly influential and realized master, protagonist of the nonsectarian *rimé* approach in eastern Tibet.
25. *kah thog*, one of the oldest Nyingma institutions in Derge, eastern Tibet, founded in 1159 and restructured in 1656.
26. *dpal yul*, a renowned Nyingma monastery founded in 1665 in the Si Khron province of eastern Tibet. The construction of this monastery was sponsored by the king of Derge, Champa Phuntsog (*byams pa phun tshogs*, circa seventeenth century), with the help of a teacher known as Sangye Tenpa (*sangs rgyas bstan pa*, circa seventeenth century). The first appointed lama of that monastery was Kunzang Sherab (*kun bzang shes rab*, 1636–1698), a student of Karma Chagme (*kar ma chags med*, 1613–1678).
27. *rdzogs chen*, a Nyingma monastery in Derge founded by Dzogchen Padma Rigdzin.
28. See Bryan J. Cuevas, *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 251 onward.
29. *dwag po rtse le gong 'og*. For information on this monastery, see Cuevas, *Hidden History*, 230–31.
30. *kong po thang 'brog 'od gsal rtse*. For information on this monastery, see Cuevas, *Hidden History*, 232–33.
31. *pad ma gling pa* (1445–1521). The lineage of these

incarnations begins with Padma Lingpa, an eclectic treasure finder who was considered a mind emanation of Vairochana, the great eighth-century Tibetan translator.

32. *lha lung lhun grub*, a monastery in Lhobrag (*lho brag*) in southern Tibet.
33. These lineages have been documented, where possible, by Cuevas in *Hidden History*.
34. *gter bdag gling pa*, also known as Padma Garwang Gyurme Dorje (*pad ma gar dbang 'gyur med rdo rje*, 1646–1714), was an influential tertön and a prolific writer who founded the monastery of Mindroling in central Tibet. He was closely linked with the Fifth Dalai Lama, with whom he shared a reciprocal student-teacher relationship. His treasure teachings are collectively known as the Southern Treasures (*lho gter*). With his brother Lochen Dharma Shri (*lo chen dhar ma shri*, 1654–1718), he contributed in a decisive way to the preservation and propagation of the Nyingma teachings.
35. See note 10 above.
36. *nang chen*, one of the five small independent kingdoms of eastern Tibet, today a part of Qinghai Province.
37. *'bri gung bka' brgyud*, a Kagyü school, founded by Drigung Kyobpa Jigten Sumgon (*'bri gung skyob pa 'jig rten gsum mgon*, 1143–1217).
38. *khros ma nag mo*, a wrathful female deity usually associated with *chod* (*gcod*), a practice aimed at severing the ego.
39. *'brug pa bka' brgyud*, a Kagyü school, founded by Tsangpa Gyare (see also note 22 above).
40. *rdo rje phur ba*, a deity, the central figure of one of the eight *mahāyoga sādhanas* transmitted by Padmasambhava.
41. *tsa ri*, a region situated east of Dagpo in southeastern Tibet, close to the border of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and to Bhutan. Considered a sacred place and often identified with Charitra, one of the twenty-four power places mentioned in Buddhist tantric literature, Tsari is particularly associated with the tantric deity

Cakrasamvara and his consort, Vajravārāhī.

42. *sde srid sangs rgyas rgya mtsho* (1653–1705), the powerful regent of the Fifth Dalai Lama (*ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617–1682) and tutor of the Sixth Dalai Lama.
43. *sde dge*, a district in eastern Tibet. Also a town below the Drida Selmogang range (*'bri zla zal mo sgang*).
44. *rin chen gter mdzod*, a massive compilation of treasure teachings made by Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, whose impact on the transmission of treasure teachings has been enormous, continuing unabated to our time. See also note 24 above.
45. For a description of this incident, see Cuevas, *Hidden History*, 315–16.
46. *smin grol gling*. With Dorje Trag (*rdo rje brag*), Mindroling, founded by Terdag Lingpa in 1676, was the most important Nyingma monastery in central Tibet.
47. *o rgyan bstan 'dzin* (1701–1727). On the death of his father, he was reared by Terdag Lingpa.
48. The various compilations of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States differ in the texts they include, reflecting the choices, interests, and so on of their compilers.

Introduction

1. See “Preface” note 8.
2. *mkhyen brtse chos kyi dbang phyug* (1910–1961), an incarnation of the famous Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and maternal uncle of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. For a biography of Khyentse Chökyi Wangchug, see Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, Enrico Dell’Angelo, ed., Nancy Simmons, trans., *The Lamp that Enlightens Narrow Minds: The Life and Times of a Realized Tibetan Master, Khyentse Chökyi Wangchug* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2012).
3. *phyag na rdo rje*. Embodiment of the power and strength of all enlightened beings as well as custodian of the tantric teachings, Vajrapāṇi appears in the visions of the

intermediate state of reality as a bodhisattva in the retinue of Buddha Amoghasiddhi.

4. The Dzogchen teaching is traditionally divided into three series, namely that of the mind essence (*sems sde*), that of vast space (*klong sde*), and that of upadeśa or secret instructions (*man ngag sde*). The seventeen tantras (*rnying ma'i rgyud bcu bdun*) belong to the last series.
5. An extraordinary Indian Dzogchen master of the eighth century and disciple of Shri Simha. He traveled to Tibet during the reign of the King Trisong Detsen (see “[Preface](#)” note 8) where he transmitted teachings, subsequently codified as the Vimalamitra Heart Essence (*bi ma syning thig*), belonging to the Dzogchen upadeśa series.
6. *myang ting 'dzin bzang po* (eighth or ninth century), literally “the good Samādhi from Myang.” He was the caretaker of the young prince Trisong Detsen and later became a monk. For seven years he remained in uninterrupted *samādhi* (*ting 'dzin*), and having attained clairvoyance, came to be known as “the Clairvoyant Monk from Myang” (*myang ban sha'i spyan*). From Vimalamitra he received the entire transmission of the Vimalamitra Heart Essence. He acted as the minister of religious affairs for the reigns of both Senaleg (*sad na legs*) and Tri Ralpachan (*khri ral pa can*). He built the temple of Zha in central Tibet (*dbu ru zha'i lha khang*), and he was killed, it is said, by Langdarma (see the following note).
7. Following Padmasambhava’s stay in Tibet, Buddhism was widely diffused during the reign of King Ralpachan (*ral pa can*, 815–838). Ralpachan was assassinated by his brother Langdarma (*glang dar ma*). Langdarma, whose reign lasted until 842, was supported by the pre-Buddhist religious orders and nobles who looked unfavorably on the propagation of the new religion. He brought the first diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet to an end with fierce persecution.
8. *byang chub rdo rje* (1826–1961), the root teacher of Chögyal Namkhai Norbu.
9. *sgar*, a sort of encampment or rural settlement.

10. *go'jo*; also phoneticized as Gonjo.
11. Sanskrit: *samsāra*.
12. See note 5 above.
13. *'ja lus 'pho ba chen po*; denotes the supreme spiritual realization in which practitioners, while still alive, transform their physical body into an immortal body of light capable of appearing and acting wherever wished.
14. *mya ngan las 'das pa*. Here the common meaning of dying is implied.
15. A drink brewed from barley.
16. Living becomes ever more problematic because lacking awareness, we encounter increasing numbers of obstacles, illnesses, and dangers of premature death.
17. *bar do*, Sanskrit: *antarabhāva*. This term denotes the interim between two states, the postmortem phase in particular. Four intermediate states are also explained in various Dzogchen tantras, such as the Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and Moon (*nyi ma dang zla ba'i kha sbyor gsang ba'i rgyud* or *nyi zla kha sbyor*) and the Tantra of the All-surpassing Sound (*sgra thal 'gyur chen po'i rgyud*).
18. *dal 'byor*. The eight freedoms and ten qualities characteristic of the precious human life. The eight freedoms (*dal ba bryad*) are: not being born as a hell being, as a hungry ghost, as an animal, as a long-lived god, in a barbarian land, in a land dominated by wrong views, in a place where the Buddha's sacred teaching is not present, and as a human being with defects of mind and of faculties. The ten qualities (*'byor ba bcu*) are: being born as a human being with perfect faculties, in a land where the Buddha's teaching is present, in a land not dominated by wrong views, possessing faith and devotion toward the Buddha's teaching, not having incompatible past actions, being born in a place where a Buddha has appeared, where he has taught, where his teaching is still present, where it can be followed, and where teachers are present to guide one on the path to liberation.
19. Sometimes human birth is said to be produced by dualism (*gnyis 'dzin*) or by the two obscurations (*sgrib gnyis*) of

emotion and of knowledge.

20. The emotions associated with the six classes of beings that appear in the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, somewhat different than the one just presented, are as follows: ignorance: gods; anger: hell beings; pride: human beings; attachment: hungry spirits; envy: demigods; ignorance: animals. Other linkages exist, like those in the literature of the Guhyagarbha tantra, which states: “[Birth] in hell is produced by actions motivated by anger, actions motivated by miserliness produce a birth among the hungry spirits, birth as an animal is produced by ignorance, birth as a human is produced by actions motivated by attachment, birth as a demigod is produced by envy, and birth as a god by pride.” From Lochen Dharmashri, *gsang snying gi spyi don* (Meaning of the Guhyagarbha tantra), Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC, <http://tbrc.org>) 3979, work no. 25983, fol. 129a.

21. See note 8 above.

22. *sgra,’od, zer*, the three ways in which the potentiality (*thugs rje*) of the primordial state of the individual manifests. Here *sound* refers to the secret sound that coexists with the primordial state and manifests once that state is realized. As that sound develops, becoming light, the clear nature of the primordial state arises as an object of vision. Then, manifesting through the capacity of *rolpa* and *tsal* energies, the five colors that are the nature of the five elements develop, becoming rays, and thereby pure and impure visions appear. See Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *Birth, Life and Death*, 123.

23. These are among the twenty-one major signs of death mentioned in the Tantra of the Great Secret Union of the Sun and Moon.

24. *’chi ba bslu ba*, literally “foiling death,” an idiom referring to practices of diverse nature employed to prolong life.

25. Externally, by accumulating merits (*phyi tshogs gsog pa*), such as making outer material offerings; internally, through interdependent (*nang rten ’brel*) methods, such as

restoring or harmonizing the energy of the elements through the powerful influence of yogic practices on winds and channels, and so on; secretly, through the method of long-life practice (*gsang ba tshe sgrub*), involving contemplation and the repetition of the mantra of long-life deities such as White Tara or Amitayus, with the aim of removing obstacles.

26. Appearance or whiteness (*snang ba* or *dkar lam*), increase or redness (*mched pa* or *mar lam*), and attainment or blackness (*thob pa* or *nag lam*). During the moment of death these lights precede the total manifestation of luminous clarity (*'od gsal*) of one's condition. They are associated respectively with the descent of the lunar vital essence from the crown of the head to the heart, the ascent of the solar vital essence from the navel to the heart, and their meeting in the heart. In the reverse sequence, the occurrence of these three lights precedes rebirth or entry into conditioned existence. See [Appendix B](#).
27. In Tantra it is said the subtle energy of the psychophysical system flows in transparent, immaterial channels. The three main ones are the central channel (*dbu ma*, Sanskrit: *avadhuti*), representing the state beyond duality, and the right and left channels. In the Ati Dzogchen tradition, the right channel in the male (*ro ma*, Sanskrit: *rasana*) is white and connected to the lunar aspect of energy, whereas the left channel (*rkyang ma*, Sanskrit: *lalana*) is red and connected to solar energy. In the female the significances of the right and left channels are reversed.
28. *yi dam*, literally “sacred mind,” the representation of the primordial nature of the individual visualized in the form of a particular deity with whom the yogin or yogini identifies in practice.
29. For experienced yogins and yoginis, manifestations of the clear light can also occur during life when the vital energy gathers in the central channel by virtue of tantric methods.
30. *myong grol*, substances such as pills and powders, empowered in particular ways that lead to liberation when swallowed.

31. *rdo rje'i glu*, a lengthy mantra that represents the state of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri. Written in the language of Oddiyāna, the mantra is known in Dzogchen texts as Liberation through Wearing (*btags grol*). Chanting it enables integration of your relative condition in the sound of the song, and entrance into the state of the inseparability of sound and instant presence.
32. *kun bzang klong drug gyi snying po*. The Essence of the Six Spaces of Samantabhadra denotes, in this case, the Six Syllables. Samantabhadra in the form of a sky-blue buddha represents the aspect of primordial enlightenment in union with his female consort, Samantabhadri.
33. *btags grol gyi 'khor lo*. An empowered circle of mantras written on paper or cloth that leads to liberation when worn on the body. It represents liberation through touch (see the following note).
34. *grol ba drug ldan*. The Six Liberations are six methods that, applying contact with the six senses, place in the recipient a cause for future liberation from conditioned existence. They are: liberation upon seeing (*mthong grol*), liberation upon hearing (*thos grol*), liberation upon smelling (*dri grol*), liberation upon tasting (*myong grol*), liberation upon touching or wearing (*reg grol* or *btags grol*), and liberation upon remembering (*dran grol*).
35. *thod rgal*, an advanced practice of Dzogchen upadeśa.
36. *gdangs*, primary energy, one of the three modes in which the potentiality (*thugs rje*) of our primordial condition manifests. The other two modes are *tsal* (*rtsal*), externally manifesting energy; and *rolpa* (*rol pa*), internally manifesting energy.
37. Visionary appearances that are the result of the development of experiences (*nyams snangs gong 'phel gyi snang ba*): the second of the four visions (*snang ba bzhi*) described in the Dzogchen teaching and in particular in the practice of direct crossing or thödgal (*thod rgal*) that makes use of the visions of clarity. The four visions are: manifest reality (*chos nyid mngon sum*), development of experiences and visions (*nyams gong 'phel*), full maturation of pure

awareness (*rig pa tshad phebs*), and exhaustion of phenomena (*chos nyid zad pa*).

38. For a Dzogchen practitioner who has had meditative experiences related to the direct crossing or thödgal practice during life, the visions that arise in the intermediate state of reality offer a unique occasion to recognize his or her own inner radiance manifesting externally. As a result of such recognition, he or she does not fall into the duality of subject and object; inner radiance merges with outer radiance, and liberation is attained.
39. In this context, union (*zung 'jug*, Sanskrit: *yuganaddha*) refers to the indivisibility of primordial purity (*ka dag*) and self-perfection (*lhun grub*) that are the basic aspects of our real condition.
40. The five buddha families (*rigs*): Tathāgata or Buddha (*de bzhin gshegs pa*, Sanskrit: *tathāgata*), Vajra (*rdo rje*), Ratna or Jewel (*rin chen*, Sanskrit: *ratna*), Padma or Lotus (*pad ma*, Sanskrit: *padma*), Karma or Action (*las*, Sanskrit: *karma*). They correspond respectively to the five buddhas Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, and Amoghasiddhi.
41. The vision of the clusters of the buddhas of the five families as the entrance (*'jug pa tshom bu'i snang ba*), the vision of wisdom as liberation (*grol ba ye shes kyi snang ba*), and the vision of self-perfection as the final realization (*mthar phyin pa lhun grub kyi snang ba*).
42. See “The Great Liberation Through Hearing” note 43.
43. The four small spheres of four-colored lights appear in the four cardinal directions inside the larger sphere.
44. Mirrorlike wisdom (*me long lta bu'i ye shes*), together with the wisdom of equality (*mnyam nyid ye shes*), wisdom of discernment (*so sor rtog pa'i ye shes*), action-accomplishing wisdom (*bya ba grub pa'i ye shes*), and the wisdom of the expanse of reality (*chos dbyings kyi ye shes*), constitute the five wisdoms, the true nature of the five emotions. In his Great Chariot commentary to the text titled *Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind* (*sems nyid ngal so'i*

'grel pa shing rta chen po) (Gangtok, India: Dodrupchen Editions), vol. Kha, fols. 170–172, Longchen Rabjampa defines them thus:

The wisdom of the expanse of reality, Vairocana, is immutable, beyond the dualism of subject and object. The total pacification of illusion, it is free of all mental construction, like the sky. Mirrorlike wisdom, Akṣobhya, is the base from which clarity and emptiness manifest; it is the great source of all wisdom. The total pacification of the consciousness, which is the base of all from which the other consciousnesses develop, serves as the base of the other three wisdoms. Like the surface of a limpid mirror, it is free of the stains of dualism. The wisdom of equality, Ratnasambhava, represents the total perfection in the equality of everything and in the equality of existence and liberation. The total pacification of pride, it is knowledge of the equality between self and others and of the indivisibility of existence and liberation. The wisdom of discernment, Amitābha, is the knowledge of all things distinctly in the variety of their manifestations and in their ultimate nature. The total pacification of craving, it is knowledge of the essential empty nature of things and of the relation between cause and effect, the nature of the multifarious relative manifestations. Action-accomplishing wisdom, principally Amoghasiddhi, is marvelous enlightened activity, never hindered in its aspects. The total pacification of jealousy, it spontaneously achieves the aims of others by means of unimpeded body, voice, and mind.

45. *shar lugs bryad*, eight different ways in which the pure dimension and the impure dimension manifest as an attribute of the primordial state.
46. *khams gsum*: the world of desire, the world of form, and the formless world.
47. Knowledge that is the wisdom of the variety and of the ultimate nature of things (*ji lta ba ji snyed pa'i ye shes kyi mkhyen cha*) is the knowledge of a realized one who understands the simultaneous infinity and empty nature of

all manifestations.

48. *gser gyi thur ma*, a scalpel as used in heart surgery held by a steady (*mi* 'gyur) hand so as to benefit and not endanger the life of the patient.
49. *sprul sku thub pa drug*, the six emanated buddhas or sages: six aspects of the emanated dimension of enlightenment (*sprul sku*, Sanskrit: *nirmāṇakāya*) that manifest in the six realms of the six classes of beings, namely: Indraśakra (*dbang po brgya byin*), sage of the gods; Vemacitra (*thags bzang ris*), sage of the demigods; Shakyasimha or Śākyamuni (*sha kya seng ge*), sage of humans; Sthirasimha (*seng ge rab brtan*), sage of animals; Jvālamukha (*kha 'bar de ba*), sage of the hungry ghosts; and Yama Dharmarāja (*chos kyi rgyal po*), sage of hell beings. They manifest in the six realms of existence: the worlds of *devas* or gods (*lha*), of *asuras* or demigods (*lha ma yin*), of humans (*mi*), of animals (*dud 'gro*), of hungry ghosts (*yid dwags*), and of hell beings (*dmyal ba*), respectively, in order to liberate the beings of those realms.
50. *thim lugs brygad*, eight modes of dissolution, referring to reabsorption in the individual's primordial state of the pure and impure dimensions that had previously manifested as attributes of his or her state. See [Appendix C](#).
51. *bum sku/gzhon nu bum sku*, a youthful vaselike body, a metaphor that represents the primordial condition of each individual.
52. Essence (*ngo bo*) together with nature (*rang bzhin*) and energy (*thugs rje*) form an inseparable trinity representing the three attributes of the primordial base of being (*gzhi*); they are the three wisdoms present as potentialities.
53. *gnas pa* (peaceful, calm state) and '*gyu ba* (movement).
54. Secret Mantra (*gsang sngags*, Sanskrit: *guhyamantra*) is a synonym for Vajrayāna.
55. This is a reference to the pure lands (*sprul pa'i zhing khams*), the abodes of the nirmāṇakāya or emanational dimension of the enlightened ones.
56. The pure land of the east called Perfect Joy (*mngon par*

dga' ba, Sanskrit: *abhirati*) of Buddha Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva; the pure land of the south called Glorious (*dpal dang ldan pa*, Sanskrit: *Śrīmat*) of Buddha Ratnasambhava; the pure land of the west called Lotus Flower Pagoda (*pad ma rtsegs pa*) of Buddha Amitābha; the pure land of the north called Complete and Perfect Action (*clas rab rdzogs pa*, Sanskrit: *karmaprasiddhi*) of Buddha Amoghasiddhi.

57. The six uncertainties (*ma nges pa'i rtags drug*): the bardo being is uncertain about its location, dwelling place, companions, sustenance, behavior, and mental events. The four terrifying enemies (*'jigs pa'i dgra bzhi*): the four elements, which manifest in an appalling way. The three horrifying abysses (*ya nga ba'i g.yang sa gsum*): red, white, and black abysses, corresponding to the three poisons of the mind: attachment, hatred, and ignorance.

The Great Liberation through Hearing

1. In the following text, the *bar do thos grol chen mo* (The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States) is referred to with a simplified title, Great Liberation or Great Liberation through Hearing.
2. *'chi ltas mtshan ma rang grol*. A text within the collection named the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States. Several editions of the collection title this text The Mirror That Clarifies the Signs of Death (*'chi ltas gsal ba'i me long*). See Dorje, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 151–81.
3. *'pho ba dran pa rang grol*. This text is part of Karma Lingpa's cycle of *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State*. See Dorje, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 197–216.
4. *bden pa'i stobs brjod*. This refers to a pronouncement, varying in language and length, that evokes the power of truth inherent in the spiritual master, the Three Supreme Jewels, and the real nature of mind and phenomena.

5. *rnam shes bkug*. Having invoked the power of truth, the guide summons with mudrās, mantras, and visualization the consciousness of the deceased from wherever it may be in cyclic existence, and imagines that it merges with an effigy symbolizing him or her.
6. *phyi dbug*, literally “outer breath”: the respiration, as opposed to the vital energy (*rlung*, Sanskrit: *prana*), called here inner breath (*nang dbug*), at this stage still present in the body of the deceased.
7. Traditionally, the body of the deceased is left untouched for three or more days after respiration ceases. During this time heat may still be felt at the heart region, and the complexion of the body may remain unchanged. For spiritual practitioners this is generally known as *thugs dam*, a meditative state that can last several weeks. Serum oozing from the nose and sexual organs, disappearance of the heat at the heart region, and deterioration of the complexion indicate that the consciousness, together with the subtle vital energy, has left the body. Touching the corpse when these signs have not yet occurred can disrupt the person’s meditative state and draw the consciousness to the place being touched, thus inducing exit of the consciousness from an inauspicious orifice that can lead to an unfortunate rebirth.
8. Among the populations of Tibet and the Himalayan regions, upon the death of a person, it is customary to invite monks or lay spiritual practitioners to perform funerary rituals at the house of the deceased. At that time, offerings are arranged on the shrine of the house, or if the household is poor, on a simple table. These offerings are then presented in the rites to the Three Supreme Jewels (the objects of refuge; see [note 113](#) below). Popularly known as *gewa* or virtue in the Himalayan regions, this occasion involves the family in many acts of generosity, including offering food and drink to relatives, friends, and others who visit the house to pay their condolences. These activities generate a sense of having done the best possible for the deceased, helping a great deal to mitigate the family’s shock and grief caused by the death of the loved person.

9. See [Appendix B, comment I.](#)
10. See the “Invocations” section.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *gzhi'i 'od gsal*, the clear light of the base, meaning the original condition of the individual before the division from the transcendent state (Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*) into cyclic existence (Sanskrit: *samsāra*) has occurred, before the condition of an enlightened being into that of an unenlightened being has arisen. During the intermediate state of the moment of death, the individual may or may not recognize the base (*gzhi*) as his or her natural condition. Here, *the clear light of the base* refers to the radiance that manifests at the moment of death, also known as the mother light (*ma'i 'od gsal*), the recognition of which allows the deceased to gain liberation.
13. See [Appendix B, comment 2.](#)
14. See [Appendix B, comment 3.](#)
15. *ye shes kyi dhu ti*. The central channel of the subtle body symbolizes the state of nonduality; the vital energy of karma does not generally enter it. See “[Introduction](#)” note 27.
16. See “[Introduction](#)” note 27.
17. See note 25 below.
18. See [Appendix B, comment 4.](#)
19. *bar do dang poi 'od gsal*, the clear light of the base that manifests at the culmination of the intermediate state of the moment of death. It is followed by the second phase of the intermediate state of the moment of death, called the clear light of the base. Sometimes referred to as two phases of the first intermediate state and sometimes as the first two intermediate states, both the clear light of the base and the clear light of the path are, in any case, manifestations of the intermediate state of the clear light of the moment of death. They are followed by the intermediate state or intermediate state of reality of the peaceful and wrathful deities, which is referred to as either the second or third state, according to the classification in

the text followed.

20. In Dzogchen praxis females are laid on their left side. See also [Appendix B, comment 5](#).
21. *rtsa rba rlabs btsir ba*. The arteries are pressed to determine when the pulsation comes to an end. The exact location on the neck where this is done is not specified in the text.
22. *gnyid log rtsa gnyi*, literally “the two arteries of sleep.” The two carotid arteries are connected to the ascending energy (*gyen rgyu rlung*, Sanskrit: *udāna*). These arteries are pressed also in some tantric exercises with the same aim, of reversing the course of the karmic winds into the central channel and manifesting the state of instant presence, clarity, and emptiness. Since the carotid arteries supply the head with oxygenated blood, if pressed firmly, they can induce the sensation of having no body, of being asleep, and of tactile numbness, probably the source of their Tibetan name. When these symptoms persist during tantric exercises, thus disturbing the training, massage with special substances is employed to restore normal condition.
23. *tshangs bug*, Sanskrit: *brahmarandra*. According to tantric anatomy, one of the nine pathways of the body from which the consciousness can issue after death. If the consciousness exits through the crown of the head, it is said that the deceased will be born in the Pure Land of the Skyfarers.
24. See [Appendix B, comment 6](#).
25. *nang dbug*. Ceasing of the inner breath, indicated by vanishing heat, fading complexion, and so on; see [note 6](#) above.
26. See [Appendix B, comment 7](#).
27. *zhi gnas*. The calm state with insight (*lhag mthong*) is one of the main aspects of meditative practice in Buddhism. Taught differently in the various systems of Sutra, Tantra, Mahāmudrā, and Dzogchen, the calm state, described in general terms, refers to the meditative practice of calming the mind in order to discern reality.
28. *rtsa bzang*. This possibly refers to a good condition of the energy channels as a result of a healthy way of life, to the

absence of undesirable types of channels (*mi 'dod pa'i rtsa*) that obstruct spiritual development, or to the activation of energy channels through tantric exercises.

29. See “**The Intermediate State of the Moment of Death**” in the Introduction; see also [Appendix B, comment 8](#).
30. *phyag rgya chen po*, Sanskrit: *mahāmudrā*. In the Sutra tradition, the Great Symbol refers to emptiness, which is the nature of all phenomena. According to the tantras, the Great Symbol refers to the final attainment of the tantric path. Exclusively in the meditative system of the Kagyü, the Great Symbol refers mainly to a meditative practice developed by Gampopa based on the four contemplations of the Dzogchen mind series that can be applied in conjunction with tantric practice or separately from it: this is the Great Symbol of the path. It aims at realizing the indivisibility of emptiness and clarity, which is the essence of mind: this is the Great Symbol of the base. Realizing this, one achieves the Great Symbol of the result. Here Great Symbol refers to realization of the reality dimension (Sanskrit: *dharma-kāya*).
31. *zung 'jug phyag rgya chen po'i sku*. This refers to the realization of the clear light that is indivisible from the reality dimension (Sanskrit: *dharma-kāya*).
32. Here the second clear light is a part of the intermediate state of the moment of death. On the several types of clear light (*'od gsal*) that appear in various intermediate states, see Henk Blezer, “A Preliminary Report on Investigations in the (*bon nyid*) *'od gsal* and *zhi khro bardo*,” in *Earlier zhang zhung snyang rgyud and snyan rgyud Literature* (Leiden, Netherlands: IIAS, 1999).
33. *gshin rje chos kyi rgyal po*. A deified embodiment of the unfailing law of cause and effect. In some iconographic representations of the visions of the intermediate state of rebirth, he is depicted as a wrathful being standing amid flames, holding a sword in his right hand and in his left hand a mirror in which the good and bad deeds of beings appear. He is surrounded by attendants, in particular a monkey-headed one who holds a slate with the record of the past deeds of the deceased and two deities coexistent

with the individual, who represent his or her good and bad conscience and who count the deeds of the deceased with white and black pebbles, respectively, according to their nature. The meeting with Yama Dharmarāja represents the way the dying person confronts his or her conscience at death, based on actions of the past life. Meeting one's conscience takes the form of a judgment that shows how past actions will result in a particular new life. One of the six sages manifests in the hell realms in the guise of Yama Dharmarāja in order to liberate hell beings.

34. The various manifestations of sound, light, and rays are the intense and bewildering visions that occur in the intermediate state of reality, while the terrifying experiences related to the lord of death are those that occur in the intermediate state of rebirth.
35. The generation stage (*bskyed rim*, Sanskrit: *utpattikrama*) and the perfection stage (*rdzogs rim*, Sanskrit: *sampannakrama*) are the two stages in which all practices of the Anuttara tantras are subsumed. The generation stage denotes the praxis by which yogins recreate the universe as the mandala and themselves as the deity through imagining. The perfection stage denotes the practice by which yogins, relying on the subtle body of channels, energies, and vital essences, come to realize the innate nature of the mind. For an extensive discussion of these two stages, see Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, Elio Guarisco and Ingrid McLeod, trans., *Elements of Tantric Practice. Book Eight, Part Three of The Treasury of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).
36. Avalokiteśvara (*jo bo thugs rje chen po*), a tantric meditational divinity and the patron deity of Tibet, is the embodiment of compassion inherent in the minds of all enlightened and unenlightened beings. In the Great Liberation through Hearing, he also appears as one of the eight male bodhisattvas.
37. Vows (*sdom pa*) and commitments (*dam tshig*) encapsulate the ethics of a tantric practitioner and refer to all that a spiritual practitioner has promised to implement in the manifold layers of meaning of a tantric initiation. Many

consider the meaning of vows and commitments to be interchangeable, while others believe that vows are injunctions as to what to implement, and commitments are injunctions as to what to avoid; still others reverse this meaning. Fundamental vows and commitments are known as basic or root. In the higher system of Atiyoga or Dzogchen, there are four basic vows, namely nonexistence, all-pervasiveness, uniqueness, and self-perfectedness. The vow of nonexistence means that there is nothing to protect; all-pervasiveness means that neither object nor subject exists; uniqueness means that all is mind essence; and self-perfection means that the mind essence includes everything, with nothing left out.

38. The mother and son realities (*chos nyid ma bu*) refer, respectively, to the clear light of the base and the clear light of the path. See “[Introduction](#)” notes 29 and 38.
39. The intermediate state of reality is usually the second of the four intermediate states. Here, however, it is referred to as the third intermediate state in relation to the clear light of the base and that of the path, which arise consecutively during the intermediate state of the moment of death, and which in this classification are called the first and second intermediate states, respectively.
40. Sound, light, and rays also represent the process in which material vision, perceived in life by the individual, unfolds from his or her primordial state. See also “[Introduction](#)” note 22.
41. See [Appendix B, comment 9](#).
42. *zhag phyed dang bzhi*. A number of translations erroneously interpret this as four and a half days due the Tibetan syntactic peculiarity of expressing phrases such as “three and a half” as “half and four,” similar to the German expression *halb vier*, “half four,” meaning 3:30.
43. This is the first day of the intermediate state of reality. The word *day* refers to the time a practitioner has dwelt in the manifest aspect of clear light, referred to as a day of contemplation (*bsam gtan gyi zhag*), meaning not an ordinary twenty-four-hour day. For those with experience

of contemplation, these days are long. For those who have no contemplative experience, this intermediate state of reality lasts only a very short time before the deceased enters in the intermediate state of rebirth.

44. *thig le brdal ba'i zhing khams*, a name for the Akaniṣṭha-Ganavyuha realm of Buddha Vairocana.
45. A scepter-like ritual object, symbolic of the primordial and undivided condition of the individual.
46. See “Introduction” note 44.
47. The blue light is called the light ray of the transcendent lord (Sanskrit: *tathāgata*), probably because Vairocana, among the five enlightened families, represents the Tathāgata or Buddha family.
48. This text associates the dim white light of the god realm with the habitual inclination for deep ignorance (*gti mug*), generally considered the primary cause for birth as an animal, while pride (*nga rgyal*) is more commonly given as the primary cause for birth in the god realm. See also “Introduction” note 20.
49. See “Introduction” note 55; see also Appendix B, comment 10.
50. See Appendix B, comment 11.
51. Akṣobhya and Vajrasattva are often interchangeable in mahāyoga as both belong to the Vajra family.
52. In the literature of the peaceful and wrathful deities, Buddhalocanā, associated with the water element, is the consort of Akṣobhya, and Māmakī, associated with the earth element, is the consort of Ratnasambhava. Here the roles of Buddhalocanā and Māmakī are reversed compared to other cycles of teaching.
53. The six enlightened beings are Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva, his consort, and the retinue of the Vajra family.
54. See Appendix B, comment 12.
55. See Appendix B, comment 13.
56. The six enlightened beings are Ratnasambhava, his consort, and the retinue of the Ratna family.

57. See Appendix B, comment 14.
58. The six enlightened beings are Amitābha, his consort, and the retinue of the Padma family.
59. *shang shang*, a mythological bird, half human and half eagle, that plays cymbals as it flies.
60. The six enlightened beings are Amoghasiddhi, his consort, and the retinue of the Karma family.
61. The six sages (*thub pa drug*), emanations of Samantabhadra, tame the beings of the particular realm where each of them manifests.
62. Reversing the earlier sequence, described in “Second Day” above, this passage associates the white light with the wisdom of the expanse of reality of Vairocana and the blue light with the mirrorlike wisdom of Akṣobhya.
63. Some editions of the original Tibetan text read “above.”
64. *rnam par mi rtog pa'i ngang*. A state in which visions and thoughts are experienced without being conceptualized and without becoming objects of compulsory judgments.
65. The perfection of this wisdom manifests simultaneously with total awakening.
66. *rdo rje sems dpa'i khong gseng gi lam*.
67. *rig 'dzin*, Sanskrit: *vidyādhara*. From a general tantric perspective, pure awareness (*rig pa*, Sanskrit: *vidyā*) denotes the wisdom of immutable supreme bliss that is primordially present as the ground, or nature, of being. A holder (*'dzin pa*, Sanskrit: *dharā*) of awareness refers to one who has reawakened this pure awareness, in the sense of becoming aware of it again, generally by means of special tantric techniques. See Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, *shes bya mdzod* (Infinite ocean of knowledge), vol. II, (Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982), 135–36.

The Nyingma school classifies awareness holders in four groups, namely the awareness holder of maturation, the awareness holder with mastery over the lifespan, the awareness holder of the Great Symbol, and the self-perfected awareness holder. Longchen Rabjampa, in his Great Chariot commentary to the text titled *Finding Comfort*

and Ease in the Nature of Mind (vol. Ka, fol. 174a3–175b6), explains that the first awareness holder refers to practitioners of the generation phase and of the completion phase who abide either on the path of accumulation or on the path of preparation. Although such practitioners still have ordinary bodies, their minds are realized as the body of the deity. If a practitioner of that kind dies before having achieved the supreme state (*chos mchog*) of the path of preparation, he or she, discarding the body, will become realized upon the maturation of the mind, that is, its transformation into the form of the deity. The second type of awareness holder refers to a practitioner who has attained the supreme state of the path of preparation and the resulting indestructible body beyond death and birth, and thus has control over his or her own life span. In this case the mind turns into the mind of the path of seeing. The third type of awareness holder refers to an individual who abides on the first to ninth levels of awakening. In this case, the body manifests as the maṇḍala of the deity and the mind as the wisdom devoid of conceptual limitations, which permits the practitioner to overcome, successively, the obscurations preventing the attainment of the next level of awakening, whichever that might be in the individual case. The fourth and last type of awareness holder refers to a practitioner who has attained the fully awakened state.

In our text, five awareness holders are identified, the fifth being the “awareness holder who abides on the levels of realization” (*sa la gnas pa'i rig 'dzin*). The five awareness holders who appear at this phase of the intermediate state are the embodiment of the great masters who have achieved the highest realization through the practice of Tantra and of Total Perfection.

68. *dag pa'i mkha' spyod kyi zhing*, Sanskrit: *khechara*. The Pure Land of the Skyfarers represents the level on which the awareness holders abide. Different levels reflected the special powers that awareness holders possess. See the extensive discussion in Jamgön Kongtrul, *shes bya mdzod* (Infinite ocean of knowledge), vol. III, 629–40.

69. See note 71 below.

70. See note 99 below.

71. A *ḍākinī* (*mkha' gro ma*), literally “skyfarer,” is a yoginī, a female being with a mundane or supramundane level of spiritual accomplishment. She can be innate, field-born, or mantra-born. The innate (*lhan skyes*) *ḍākinīs* are enlightened beings who reside in Akaniṣṭha (*'og min*), the enjoyment dimension of enlightenment, and who manifest in the form of female meditation deities. The field-born (*zhing skyes*) *ḍākinīs* abide in unsurpassable contemplation and manifest as yoginīs in the twenty-four or thirty-two sites, famed in Tantra as power places on our earth. The mantra-born (*sngags skyes*) *ḍākinīs* are women who train in tantric methods and dwell in undetermined places. There are, moreover, potential *ḍākinīs*, who can be recognized by their psychophysical traits described in the tantras. Often *ḍākinīs* manifest as human yoginīs who, as teachers, consorts, or guardians, help spiritual practitioners along the path to self-realization.

The twenty-four or thirty-two principal sacred places are located in different areas of the Indian subcontinent. However, each region of our world contains equally sacred places that are, in an outer sense, physical locations where the heroes and yoginīs dwell. In an inner sense, these are areas where the vital essences (heroes) and energy channels (yoginīs) of the human body are found. The eight charnel grounds or cemeteries mentioned in the text are eight of the twenty-four sacred places. In a *maṇḍala* visualized as encircling the rim of the divine mansion of the deity, the cemeteries in an inner sense represent the purity of the eight groups of consciousnesses whose duality (apprehender and apprehended) is overcome by realizing the meaning of the eight examples: an image in a mirror, a dream, a magical creation, an optical illusion, a city of scent-eaters, an echo, a reflection on water, and space. The three abodes (*gnas gsum*) refer to the Body, Voice, and Mind of enlightenment.

72. *ging*, Sanskrit: *kingkara*, minor deities who attend the main deities of the *maṇḍala* by performing different tasks. They also appear in the retinue of Yama, the lord of death, in

the form of male and female *citipati* (*sgrol ging bdag po*). Some kingkara are said to be emanations of wisdom deities. In dramas they are portrayed as dancing skeletons that hold and beat drums.

73. *rus pa'i rgyan drug*. Bone ornaments are listed in various ways in the tantras and treatises of tantric adepts. Generally speaking, five basic ornaments are listed, with an additional sixth ornament sometimes mentioned. In the Hevajra tantra, for example, the five ornaments are: a wheel-like crown ornament (*'khor lo*), symbolizing Vajrasattva-Akṣobhya and mirrorlike wisdom; earrings (*rna cha*), symbolizing Amitābha and the wisdom of discernment; a necklace (*mgul rgyan*), symbolizing Ratnasambhava and the wisdom of equality; bracelets (*lag gdu*) and anklets (*gdu bu*), symbolizing Vairocana and the wisdom of the expanse of reality; and a girdle (*ske rags*), symbolizing Amoghasiddhi and action-accomplishing wisdom. Jamgön Kongtrul, *dpal kye'i rdo rje'i rgyud kyi rgyal po brtags pa gnyis pa'i tshid don rnam par 'grol ba gzhom med rdo rje'i gsang ba 'byed pa* (Disclosing the secret of the invincible vajra: Phrase by phrase commentary to the Hevajra tantra, two examinations) (Rumtek, India: Dharma Chakra Centre, 1981), fols. 66a6–b1. The additional ornament is human ashes (*thal chen*) from a cremation ground and smeared on the body (fol. 77b3). Sometimes included is another ornament not made of bone, the sacred thread worn by Brahmins (*tshangs skud*). The six ornaments are said to represent the purity of the six perfections—necklace: generosity; bracelets: ethics; earrings: patience; crown ornament: diligence; sacred thread: meditation; and girdle or human ashes: wisdom. Jamgön Kongtrul, *spyi don legs par bshad pa gsang ba bla na med pa rdo rje drva ba'i rgyan* (General meaning of the Hevajra tantra, topical commentary), woodblock print, Palpung Monastery, fol. 78a7.
74. *damaru*, a small hand-held double-faced drum made of two human skulls.
75. *zhing*. The term *released beings* refers to the ten fields (*zhing bcu*), that is, to individuals who satisfy the ten

conditions for the punishing rite of release (*grol ba*): an enemy of the Three Precious Jewels who causes great harm to the teaching; in particular, an enemy of a qualified spiritual master; practitioners who let their pledges deteriorate and do not restore them; those who reject the way of the secret mantra, having already entered its path; those who despise the master or members of the vajra family; unauthorized individuals who participate in tantric activities with the intention of stealing; those who have harmed other sentient beings; those who are fierce enemies of committed spiritual practitioners; those who engage exclusively and continuously in evil actions; and those whose evil actions foster rebirth in the three lower forms of life, or who are currently experiencing the result of these actions in the lower forms of life. Lochen Dharmashri, *sdom pa gsum rnam par nges pa'i gyi 'grel pa legs bshad ngo mtshar dpag bsam gyi snye ma* (The commentary that ascertains the three vows: The wish-fulfilling cluster of good explanations) (Gangtok, India: Dodrupchen Rinpoche Publications), fols. 261–62.

76. A *daka* (*dpa' bo*), or spiritual hero, is the male counterpart of a *ḍākinī*, described in note 70 above.

77. See Appendix B, comment 15.

78. Major and minor relics (*gdung dang rin sel*) are signs that manifest at the cremation of an excellent yogin as external signs paralleling inner realization. The major relics are associated with the five enlightened families and are of five kinds, namely *shariram*, *pariram*, *churiram*, *seriram*, and *nyariram*. Shariram relics are the size of a pea, brilliant white in color, and are associated with the Tathāgata family; they are the pure essence of bone and are found in the head. Pariram relics, the size of a mustard seed or a small pea, are blue and black in color and are associated with the Vajra family; they are the pure essence of heat found between the ribs. Churiram relics, the size of a mustard seed, are yellow in color and are associated with the Ratna family; they are the pure essence of blood and are found in the area above the liver. Seriram relics, the size of a mustard seed, are brilliant red and are associated

with the Padma family; they are the pure essence of all the elements and are found in the kidneys. Nyariram relics, the size of a mustard seed, are brilliant green in color and are associated with the Karma family; they are the pure essence of consciousness and are found in the area above the lungs. All the relics are luminous, vividly colored, and round. These types of relics appear after cremation as an indication that the yogin has become realized on meeting the deity of the family related to the relic that has appeared.

Other minor relics appearing at the cremation of an excellent yogin are the size of a sesame seed or a dust particle and resemble the major ones. See the *dpal nam mkha' med pa'i sku gdung 'bar ba chen po'i rgyud* (Great tantra of the glorious blazing nonspatial relics), in *rnying ma rgyud chu bdun* (Collected Nyingmapa tantras of the mind series), reproduced from a set of prints from the Adzom blocks preserved in the Library of Dudjom Rinpoche by Sanje Dorje, vol. III (New Delhi, 1973), fols. 15a–16b.

79. *sku*. The two forms of deities that can appear are peaceful and wrathful. The yogins and yoginiṣ whose dead bodies manifest relics of both peaceful and wrathful deities will experience no intermediate state, and they will be endowed with the certainty of the primordial purity, the essence. If indications of only peaceful deities appear, the yogins and yoginiṣ will perceive reality and merge into enlightenment within five days. If the forms of wrathful deities appear, these practitioners will be liberated instantly from the fivefold transmigration in the intermediate state of reality. See *dpal nam mkha' med pa'i sku gdung 'bar ba chen po'i rgyud*, fol. 15a.
80. *'od*. The light can be of three kinds. If a halo of light with a rim appears in the place where a yogin or a yogini has died, this indicates that he or she will attain the result of spiritual accomplishment during the first intermediate state. A vertical beam of light indicates that he or she will become enlightened in an instant without the intermediate states arising. A rib-shaped light indicates that he or she will manifest enlightenment in the last intermediate state.

The fortunate being who achieves enlightenment in the mandala of light will emanate in ten directions to fulfill the benefit of beings. See *dpal nam mkha' med pa'i sku gdung 'bar ba chen po'i rgyud*, fol. 16b.

81. The last two sentences paraphrase an expression from the Mañjuśrīnāmasamgīti; see [note 106](#) below.
82. The Natural Liberation of the Aggregates (*btags grol phung po rang grol*). See Dorje, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 347–79.
83. Yama is identical with (Yama) Dharmarāja. See [note 33](#) above.
84. See [Appendix B, comment 16](#).
85. *rnam shes tshogs brgyad*; the five sense consciousnesses plus the mental consciousness, the emotion-tainted consciousness, and the consciousness base of all.
86. *dur bya/kang bya*, a vulture species with a black head and a white back that feeds on corpses, typically found in charnel grounds.
87. Here the names of the four female gatekeepers are the same as those given in the context of the vision of the peaceful deities. However, their names as members of the wrathful retinue are Vajratejasī, Vajrāmoghā, Vajralokā, and Vajravetālī.
88. The colors of the twenty-eight īśvarī vary in different texts, even among the texts belonging to the cycle of the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State*. They appear here as in the original Tibetan text. The identification of the implements they hold in their hands also differs, and occasionally their heads as well. Some of these variations are reported in Appendix C in the charts of the peaceful and wrathful deities.
89. *ri rab*. According to ancient Indo-Buddhist cosmology, each world system comprises a central Mount Sumeru, a sort of axis mundi, and five continents. On the Indian subcontinent, Mount Sumeru has often been identified with Mount Kailash in western Tibet, a mountain sacred in both Buddhism and Hinduism.

90. *yig drug*, the six syllables of the Avalokiteśvara mantra.
91. *mtshams med lnga*: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat or a realized being, causing a buddha to bleed with cruel intent, and causing a schism within the spiritual community.
92. See [Appendix B, comment 17](#).
93. *log lta*, disbelief in the law of cause and effect and other such views that can lead to mistaken ways of life.
94. *nyi zla sangs rgyas*. See “Translator’s Introduction.”
95. Dancing deity (*lha bran gar byed*), literally “dancing servant deity.” According to some, the name refers to two different-size mountains, Gampodar (*sgam po gdar*) being the smaller of the two. Thus the expression *lha bran gar byed* is taken to mean “the smaller of the two dancing deities” or mountains. See Bryan J. Cuevas, “The Hidden Treasures of sGam-pogdar Mountain: A History of the Zhi-Khro Revelations of Karma gling-pa and the Making of the Tibetan Book of the Dead” (PhD diss., University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 2000), 23n57.
96. *brdzus skyes su 'byung ba*. Miraculous or spontaneous birth is one of the four modes of birth; the other three are womb birth, egg birth, and birth from heat and moisture. See also “Obstructing Womb Entrances” below.
97. These verses are found in Vasubandhu’s Treasure of Phenomenology (Tibetan: *mgon par mdzod*, Sanskrit: *abhidharma*), 3:13–14.
98. *bskal pa bzang po*, Sanskrit: *bhadrakalpa*. Here the “present aeon,” in which one thousand buddhas are said to be destined to appear, refers in particular to the first part of this auspicious aeon, the age of perfection (*rdzogs ldan*), when beings had bodies of light.
99. *mtshan dpe*. The thirty major and eighty minor marks are specific physical characteristics and traits distinguishing the nirmāṇakāya form of buddhas or great beings.
100. *rdo rje'i gdan*, Sanskrit: *vajrasana*, a reference to the place where Buddha Śākyamuni attained complete enlightenment, the village of Bodhgaya in the present state

of Bihar in India.

101. *las kyi rdzu 'phrul*. Miraculous abilities stemming from past actions are temporary special capacities like those described in this text, which naturally manifest in this phase of the intermediate state.
102. *las kyi sha za srin po*, visionary appearances that execute the orders of Yama Dharmarāja and represent the result of an uneasy conscience over past negative deeds.
103. *lhan cig skyes pa'i 'dres*. Some editions have *mnyam por 'ong ba'i 'dres*.
104. *rag sha glang mgo*. *Raksha* or *rākṣasa* (*srin mo*) is a Sanskrit term for flesh-eating demons found in Buddhism as well as in Hinduism.
105. *ngo bo nyid sku*, Sanskrit: *svabhāvikakāya*, the dimension that comprises and transcends the three dimensions (*sku*, Sanskrit: *kaya*) of reality, perfect enjoyment, and emanation.
106. These words, with a slight variation in the first line, are found in chapter IX, “The Wisdom of Equality,” of the Mañjuśrīnāmasamgiti. Garab Dorje, in his commentary to this tantra (*'jam dpal mtshan 'grel* [Commentary on the Mañjuśrīnāmasamgiti], In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, TBRC W25983, vol. 60 [3965], fols. 39a 5–6), says that the words of the first line, *skad cig thams cad bye brag phyed*, refer to the manner of liberation of individuals with high, middling, and lesser capacities. The words of the second line, *skad cig gcig gis rdzogs sangs rgyas*, mean that superior to these is the liberation of the person of the very best capacity, who attains perfect enlightenment in an instant.
107. *gshin po'i cho ga kang ka ni*. Gyurme Dorje, in the glossary to his translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, identifies this ritual as the Kangkhanidharani (*kang kha ni gzungs*), an incantation text associated with Akṣobhya-Vajrasattva through which offerings are made on behalf of the deceased.
108. *ngan song sbyong ba*, Sanskrit: *sarvadurgatiparishodhana*, a ritual derived from the Sarvadurgatiparishodhana tantra (*ngan song sbyong rgyud*), an important *yogatantra* found

among the earlier Buddhist Sanskrit works translated into Tibetan. The rite, often practiced in Tibetan monasteries, is centered around Kunrig (*kun rig*, Sanskrit: *sarvavidya*), a form of Vairocana.

109. In the highest tantras, both the illusory body (*sgyu lus*) practice, which is related to the relative truth, of the father tantra series, and the clear light (*'od gsal*) practice, which is related to the ultimate truth, of the mother tantra series, are the main foci; however, here the father tantras, such as the Guhyasamāja, are prevalent. In the first-mentioned practice, one trains in understanding the illusory nature of everything and, in particular, in assuming the illusion-like form of the deity until actual manifestation as the deity becomes possible.
110. The slippery oval embryo (*mer mer po*, Sanskrit: *kalaka*) and the thickening oval embryo (*nur nur po*, Sanskrit: *arbuda*) are the first two of the five stages of embryonic and fetal development (*mngal gyi gnas skabs lnga*) explained in the tantras. The order of these two phases is sometimes reversed.
111. *dri za*, Sanskrit: *gandharva*, a class of spirits that lives on odors. Sometimes seen by people with visionary faculties, a city of scent-eaters may appear in space and then disappear instantly, leaving no trace. The term is also used to refer to beings in the intermediate state.
112. These are the eight analogies for the illusory nature of things (*sgyu ma'i dpe brgyad*).
113. Refuge is an affirmation of trust in the Buddha or in one's teacher, his teaching (Sanskrit: *dharma*), and the community of those who practice it (Sanskrit: *sangha*). In some traditions, the Three Supreme Jewels are identified as guru, representing the dharmakāya dimension; meditation deities, representing the saṃbhogakāya; and dākinīs, representing the nirmāṇakāya.
114. *gling bzhi*. In ancient Indo-Buddhist cosmology, our world is formed of the four great continents, with Mount Sumeru at the center. According to the explanations found in Vasubandhu's *Treasure of Phenomenology* (*mgon par mdzod*,

Sanskrit: *abhidharma*), the names of three of these continents indicate their distinctive features: the eastern continent, Videha (*lus 'phags po*), literally “majestic body,” where the human body is remarkably majestic; the western continent, Aparagodanya (*ba lang spyod*), literally “bountiful cows,” where the wish-fulfilling cow provides an abundance of wealth; and the northern continent, Uttarakuru (*sgra mi snyan*), literally “unpleasant sound,” where, due to the mischief of unruly *nāgas*, the sun is sometimes covered with clouds and as a consequence the normally appealing music of drums and stringed instruments becomes cacophonous. The southern continent, Jambudvīpa (*dzam bu gling*), literally “rose apple continent,” derives its name from the Tibetan word for the rose apple, a fruit once found on the shores of Lake Manasarovar near the sacred Mount Kailash; it produced the sound *jambu* when it fell into the water. See Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, Kalu Rinpoche Translation Group, trans., *Myriad Worlds: Buddhist Cosmology in Abhidharma, Kalacakra, and Dzogchen. Book One of The Treasury of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2003).

115. *che mchog he ru ka*, the Great Glorious Buddha Heruka, the central figure in the mandala of wrathful deities. See “Tenth Day” in “Introduction to Recognizing the Intermediate State of Reality.”

116. *rta mgrin*. Usually identical with Padma Heruka (see “Twelfth Day” in “Introduction to Recognizing the Intermediate State of Reality”).

117. See “Introduction” note 3.

118. *krong gis bskyed pa*. This expression, usually spelled *dkrong bskyed*, refers to instantaneous visualization. See Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye, *shes bya mdzod* (Infinite ocean of knowledge), vol. 1, root fol. 71.

119. In Buddhist cosmology, the universe comprises three dimensions: the realm of desire, the realm of form, and the formless realm. The realm of form includes the four states of meditative stability, simply known as first, second, third, and fourth meditative stability. The action that produces birth in this existence is known as unmovable

action (*mi gyo ba'i las*), which consists of the force of meditative stability itself. Birth in the realm of form is miraculous, needing no parents, just like that of demonic forces and hungry ghosts, mentioned subsequently in the paragraph. See Jamgön Kongtrul, *Myriad Worlds*.

120. *mi pham*, a name of Maitreya.
121. *'khor los bsgyur ba'i rgyal po*, Sanskrit: *chakravartin*, a ruler of the four continents by virtue of his possession of seven special articles, namely, a wheel, a precious jewel, a precious queen, a precious minister, a precious elephant, a precious horse, and a precious general. See Jamgön Kongtrul, *Myriad Worlds*, 134–38.
122. A tall beautiful tree (*Shorea robusta*), fairly common in India and Nepal.
123. *bram ze'i rigs*, one of the four Indian castes.
124. *btags grol phung po ran grol*, a text often placed among the corollary texts of the Great Liberation through Hearing. It presents the state of realization of the peaceful and wrathful deities in the form of mantras that bring liberation by wearing them. See Dorje, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 343–79.
125. *chos spyod bag chags rang grol*, a tantric generation practice of the peaceful and wrathful deities within one's body, often appearing as a corollary text of the Great Liberation through Hearing. See Dorje, *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 59–91.

Invocations

1. *sang rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnams ra mda' sbran pa'i smon lam 'jigs pa rang grol*. This invocation should be recited when death approaches.
2. This verse is missing in some versions of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States.
3. This mantra is missing in the edition published by Sherab Drime (Jamgön Kongtrul, *rin chen gter mdzod*, Paro, Bhutan: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976–1980) and is

also not found in Dudjom Rinpoche's three-volume *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* (see the Bibliography). It is present, however, in the Amdo edition compiled by Khanpo Dorje (see the Bibliography) as well as in other editions.

4. The order as well as the wording of these verses varies in the different editions of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States.
5. This verse is missing in several editions of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States.

The Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States

1. In Tibetan, the six intermediate states are *skye gnas bar do*, *rmi lam bar do*, *bsam gtan bar do*, *'chi kha bar do*, *chos nyid bar do*, and *srid pa bar do*, respectively.
2. *'od gsal*. In some editions, instead of *clear light*, the term *mngon sum* appears.

Appendix A

1. Signs of the nearness of death are grouped in four categories on a scale of proximity: approaching, impending, imminent, and immediately imminent.
2. *bshad rgyud*. The second of the Four Medical Tantras (*rgyud bzhi*), the basic textbook of Tibetan medicine.

Appendix B

1. Trulshig Rinpoche and Taglung Tsetrul Rinpoche, eds., *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State, Extract from the Profound Dharma, Titled the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State* (*zab chos zhi kro dgongs pa rang grol las bar do thos grol chen mo*) (Delhi: Sherab Drimay, 2007).
2. *zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol cha lag las bar do thos grol chen mo'i chos nyid bar do dang srid pa bar do bcas pa'i*

ngo sprod gsal 'debs kyi 'don bsgrigs re gzigs mthong don gsal ba bar do'i du kha myur grol bi dza ha ra, translated and compiled by Elio Guarisco.

3. *rlung lnga*, the five principal wind energies that preside over different psychophysical functions. See the explanation in the introduction to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *Birth, Life and Death*.
4. *me myam kyi rlung*. Located mainly in the digestive tract, this wind enables the digestion of food and drink, separates the nutritive essence from chaff, and ripens the organic components of the body.
5. *srog 'dzin gyi rlung*. Located mainly in the head, this wind presides over the functions of swallowing food and drink, inhalation, exhalation, sneezing, and belching; it confers clarity on the perceptions of the eyes and the other senses and supports the brain functions.
6. *thur sel gyi rlung*. Located mainly in the anal region, this wind governs the retention or expulsion of semen, menstrual blood, urine, and feces.
7. *gyen rgyu'i rlung*. Located mainly in the chest, this wind presides over the function of speech; strengthens the vigor of the body, the physical appearance, and energy; and allows manifestation of presence and awareness.
8. *khyab byed kyi rlung*. Located mainly in the heart, this wind distributes the vital essences through the circulation of the blood, pervades the entire nervous system, and presides over all movements of the body.
9. Sanskrit: *dharani*, a sacred, generally intelligible phrase found in both Sutra and Tantra, whereas only mantra, a shorter syllabic formula that is historically older, is present in esoteric Buddhism.
10. Not identified.
11. *srog rtsa*, literally “life channel.”
12. *zhe sdang gi rtog pa so gsum*. For a detailed explanation, see Jamgön Kongtrul, Elio Guarisco and Ingrid McLeod, trans., *Systems of Buddhist Tantra. Book Six, Part Four of The Treasury of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications,

2005), 260–62.

13. *'dod chag kyi rtog pa bzhi bcu*. For a detailed explanation, see Jamgön Kongtrul, *Systems of Buddhist Tantras*, 262–63.
14. At this point the seven concepts related to ignorance will cease. For a detailed explanation, see Jamgön Kongtrul, *Systems of Buddhist Tantras*, 263–64.
15. *thob pa*. In some explanations, this phase, in which consciousness fades away, is divided into attainment (*thob pa*) and near attainment (*nyer thob*). For a detailed discussion on the meaning of the three lights, see Jamgön Kongtrul, *Systems of Buddhist Tantras*, 251–78.
16. For this reason a dying person sometimes asks to be lifted up or to have a pillow raised.
17. In some instances vapor exudes from the crown of the head of the dying person.
18. *bzang spyod smon lam*, Sanskrit: *bodhisattvapranidhanaraja*. A famous Mahayana invocation related to the conduct of the bodhisattva.
19. *bde chen zhing smon*. A well-known invocation expressing the aspiration for birth in the pure western realm of Amitābha.
20. *zangs mdog dpal ri'i smon lam*. An invocation which expresses the aspiration for birth in the pure realm of Padmasambhava.
21. *mtshan byang*, usually a drawing representing the deceased and the objects of his sense enjoyments, or more simply the inscription of the character སྒྱ (nri), symbol of the human condition. The consciousness of the deceased is made to merge in this effigy by means of certain verbal formulas communicating profound truths.
22. *byang chog*. For an example of this rite, see Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *Chang-Chog of the Namchö Shitro: A Short Purification Ritual* (Arcidosso, Italy: Shang Shung Publications, 2008).
23. Counting from the day of death.
24. *thar pa chen po'i mdo*, a discourse of the Buddha intended to purify negative actions.

25. *pad ma dkar po'i mdo/dam chos pad ma dkar po'i mdo*, Sanskrit: *suddharma pundarika sutra*, the White Lotus sutra, a famous Mahayana sacred teaching.
26. *sangs rgyas mtshan 'bum*, a collection of the names of the Buddha.
27. *smon lam rgya mtsho*, not identified.
28. *rdo rje gcod pa*, Sanskrit: *vajraccheddika*, the Diamond Sutra, a renowned Mahayana scripture belonging to the Perfection of Discerning Wisdom (Sanskrit: *prajñāpāramitā*) class of Buddhist literature.
29. *rigs drug gnas 'dren*, a funerary rite.
30. *tshogs gi 'khor lo*, Sanskrit: *ganachakra*.

Appendix C

1. The *kama* (*bka' ma*) and *terma* (*gter ma*) lineages are two modes of transmission in the Nyingma school. The first is the long lineage of teachings beginning with the Buddha; the other consists of the transmission of rediscovered termas or concealed hidden treasures.
2. Tsewang Rigdzin (*tshe dbang rig 'dzin*; born circa 1958), *lha rnams kyi zhal thang bri thabs* (The manner of painting deities in *thangkas*). Full title: *lhag pa'i lha rnam kyi zhal thang bri thabs kun bzang rnam par rol pa'i phyag rgya* (The manner of painting the superior deities in *thangkas*: The mudrā of the complete manifestation of Samantabhadra) (Clement Town, India: The Eastern Sun Group, Ngagyur Nyingma College, 2005), TBRC W1KG4927. This extensive manual for *thangka* painters describes the visual appearance of most deities in the Tibetan pantheon. The section on the peaceful and wrathful deities presents iconography according to Karma Lingpa's *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State* (henceforth referred as KLZ), as well as from *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: Natural Liberation of Feeling* (*zhi khro tshor ba rang grol*, henceforth referred to as NLF).
3. The Immaculate Confession tantra (*dri med bshags rgyud*)

was translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan by Vimalamitra and Nyak Jñanakumara. Its full title is *dam tshig thams cad kyi nyams chag skong ba'i lung lnga bshags pa thams cad kyi rgyud dri ma med pa'i rgyal po*.

4. Meditation mudrā (*mnyam bzhag gi phyag rgya*): right hand resting in left palm with thumbs touching.
5. Depicted in union with her consort, Samantabhadri embraces the neck of Samantabhadra with both hands.
6. Sambhogakāya attire: eight jeweled ornaments and five silk garments. See Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999), 318.
7. See “The Great Liberation Through Hearing” note 51.
8. The colors of the brilliant light emanating from the five buddhas and their consorts correspond to the natural purity of the five elements.
9. Kṣitigarbha’s attribute, usually a wish-fulfilling jewel, is here a sprouting jewel (*rin po che'i smyu gu*).
10. *klu shing*, A tree whose wood, when burned, emits a smoke used to ward off negative nāga influences.
11. According to the iconography of Karma Lingpa’s *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities*, Mañjuśrī holds a sword. The blue lotus description is found in the Immaculate Confession tantra and is given here to conform to the symbolism employed from the same source.
12. In *Natural Liberation through Words of Confession*, the male bodhisattvas are associated with the eight consciousnesses and the female bodhisattvas with the eight related sense objects. The eight consciousnesses are the four sense consciousnesses listed in the table plus those of body, mind, tainted emotions, and the base of all consciousnesses (*kun gzhi*).
13. A garland of jewels, according to the Immaculate Confession tantra.
14. The terms *loosely crossed legs* (*sems skyil*) and *half-crossed legs* (*phyed skyil*) correspond to the same position as performed by males or females, respectively.

15. In Karma Lingpa's *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* (KLZ), the male gatekeepers hold a hook, a noose, a chain, and a bell, respectively.
16. Here the source of the symbolism related to the attributes is Rongzompa Chökyi Zangpo (*rong zom pa chos kyi bzang po*, 1012–1088), *sang snying gi 'grel pa* (Commentary to the Guhyagarbha tantra). In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 67 [3972], TBRC W25983, fol. 88b.
17. Here the source of the symbolism of the attributes is the Guhyagarbha commentary by Jampel Dewai Nyima (*'jam dpal bde ba'i nyi ma*), *dpal gsang pa'i snying po de kho na nyid nges ba'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa zab don sgo brgya 'byed pa'i lde'u mig* (Commentary to the tantra to the definitive reality, the essence of secrets: The key that opens a hundred of doors to the profound meaning), in *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 79, TBRC W25983 [3984], fol. 92a.
18. See “Preface” note 10.
19. Sanskrit names are not given for the other four awareness holders.
20. Mahottara Heruka and his consort do not appear among the descriptions of the wrathful deities in the section of the Great Liberation through Hearing titled Vision of the Wrathful Deities in the Intermediate State of Reality—hence the reference to the more commonly cited number of fifty-eight wrathful deities in the title to this section, even though our listing actually includes sixty. Mahottara Heruka and his consort have been included here for the sake of describing their iconography.
21. In the following two tables, the names of the deities have not been translated since they are simply the names of the respective families plus the term *heruka*, meaning male wrathful deity, or *Krodheśvari*, meaning female wrathful deity. With the exception of Mahottara Heruka, the Tibetan names are phoneticized Sanskrit. The *mātarah* are also generally known only by their Sanskrit names.
22. KLZ: double vajra, sword, khaṭvāṅga.
23. The grotesque appearances and actions of the wrathful deities are symbolic of the various aspects of the spiritual

path. For instance, in his commentary on the Guhyagarbha tantra, the tenth-century mahasiddha Lalitavajra (*sgeg pa'i rdo rje*) states:

Extracting the heart symbolizes cutting at the root the working of the mind; extracting the organs symbolizes closing the door of the senses; pulling out entrails symbolizes the purification of clinging; severing limbs symbolizes the termination of negative actions; drinking blood symbolizes the consummation of attachment; gnawing on bones symbolizes the purification of aversion.

In Lalitavajra (*sgeg pa'i rdo rje*), *Sgyu 'phrul gang 'gel pa, in bkha' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, TBRC vol. no. 3968, work no. 25983, fol. 97a.

24. In the Great Liberation through Hearing she is black, in KLZ green.
25. Greenish-red, according to KLZ.
26. The descriptions given here agree mainly with those in the Great Liberation through Hearing, and the symbolism of the attributes with the commentary on the Guhyagarbha tantra by Dorje Gyaltsen (*rdo rje rgyal mtshan*, 1137–1227), *gsang ba snying po'i 'grel pa nyi ma'i snying po smad cha* (Commentary to the essence of secrets: Heart of the sun, volume 2 [Guhyagarbha tantra commentary]), in *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* (Nyingma kama collections), TBRC W25983, vol. 66 [3971], fols. 203b–204b.
27. The source for the activities specified here is Lalitavajra's Guhyagarbha tantra commentary (*gsang ba'i snying po'i 'grel pa spar khab* [Commentary to the essence of secrets: Precious realm of light], in *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 63, TBRC W25983 [3968], fol. 97b). In this commentary and also in the one cited in the previous note, Vetalī is called *thal byed mo*, Pukkasī is called *sbos mo*, and Gashmari is called *ma tshogs ma*.
28. These eight deities are called either mātarah (Sanskrit for “mothers”) or gaurī (after the first in the group). In this translation of the Great Liberation through Hearing, the

term *gaurī* is used.

29. The majority of the details given here for the eight *gaurī* are from Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: Natural Liberation of Feeling (NLF).
30. The description of the attributes given here has its source in the Great Liberation through Hearing and in some cases varies from that of KLZ.
31. The source of the symbolism of the attributes is Dorje Gyaltsen, Guhyagarbha tantra commentary, TBRC W25983, vol. 66 [3971], fols. 205a–206b.
32. Ibid., fol. 227b.
33. The vajra beak description is from NLF.
34. The names of these four deities as they appear here are the ones generally used in the Guhyagarbha tantra commentaries. In the Guhyagarbha commentary by Longchenpa (*klong chen pa*, 1308–1364), the four female gatekeepers also symbolize the overcoming of the four demons, sealed with the four wisdoms. See *dpal gsang ba snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa phyogs bcu'i mun pa thams cad rnam par sel ba*, in *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, TBRC W25983 vol. 68 [3973], fol. 295b, line 6.
35. Here the source of the symbolism is Dorje Gyaltsen, Guhyagarbha tantra commentary, TBRC W25983, vol. 66 [3971], fols. 206b–207b.
36. Called the four wisdom-gatekeepers (*ye shes sgo ma bzhi*) in KLZ.
37. NLF states “clad only in a human skin, they are performing a bizarre, majestic dance on fresh human corpses crossed like a double vajra.”
38. The colors given here are from the Great Liberation through Hearing, with variations in KLZ given in the notes. Manurākṣasī is brownish-white in KLZ.
39. KLZ: yellowish-white.
40. KLZ: bluish-white.
41. KLZ: monkey-headed.
42. KLZ: reddish-white.

- 43. KLZ: yellowish-red.
- 44. KLZ: yellowish-red.
- 45. KLZ: yellowish-white.
- 46. *khra*. The term can refer to a hawk, a falcon, or a sparrow.
- 47. KLZ: greenish-yellow.
- 48. KLZ: reddish-green.
- 49. KLZ: light red.
- 50. KLZ: bluish-green.
- 51. KLZ: greenish-red.
- 52. KLZ: blackish-green.
- 53. KLZ: reddish-green.
- 54. KLZ: green.

Bibliography

Sources in Tibetan

EDITIONS OF THE GREAT LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING CONSULTED

The translation from the Tibetan of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States and of a number of corollary invocations in this book is based on several editions of this cycle of teaching:

- I. A photo-offset edition of the *Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States, an extract from Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State* (*zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol las bar do thos grol chen mo*), edited and corrected by Trulshig Rinpoche and Taglung Tsetrul Rinpoche. Delhi: Sherab Drimay, 2007. This edition comprises the following eighteen texts:
 1. Prayer for Union with the Spiritual Teacher of the Three Enlightened Dimensions: Natural Liberation without Renouncing the Three Poisons (*sku gsum bla ma'i rnal 'byor gyi gsol 'debs dug gsum ma spang rang grol*), a terma of Karma Lingpa.
 2. Natural Liberation of Habitual Tendencies (*chos spyod bag chags rang grol*), a terma of Karma Lingpa.
 3. Elucidation of the Intermediate State of Reality: Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State (*chos nyid bar do'i gsol 'debs thos grol chen mo*), a terma of Karma Lingpa, including an appendage of several dharanis that purify lower existences and negativities, and so on, and a few verses of dedication. This is the

first text translated in this book in “The Great Liberation through Hearing.”

4. Invocation That Calls to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help: Natural Liberation of Fear (*sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnams la ra mda' sbran pa'i smon lam 'jig pa rang grol*), a terma of Karma Lingpa. This invocation is translated in this book.
5. Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States (*bar do drug gi rtsa tshig*). No colophon. This invocation is translated in this book.
6. Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate States (*bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi smon lam*), written by Padmasambhava. This invocation is translated in this book.
7. Elucidation of the Intermediate State of Rebirth: The Great Liberation by Hearing (*srid pa bar do'i ngo sprod gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo*), a terma of Karma Lingpa. This text is translated in this book in “Introduction to the Intermediate State of Rebirth.”
8. Liberation through Wearing: Natural Liberation of the Aggregates (*btags grol phung po rang grol*), a terma of Karma Lingpa.
9. Essence of Natural Liberation: The Abridged Meaning of the Natural Liberation of the Aggregates or Liberation through Wearing (*btags grol phung po rang grol gyi don bsdus rang grol snying po*), a terma of Karma Lingpa.
10. Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States (*bar do'i smon lam 'jigs skyobs ma*). No colophon. This invocation is translated in this book.
11. Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Signs of Death (*'chi ltas mtshan ma rang grol*), a terma of Karma Lingpa.
12. The Profound Rite of Deceiving Death, an Extract from the Small Brown Volume on the History of Dzogpa Chenpo (*rdzogs pa chen po'i lo rgyus mdo byang po ti smug chung las 'chi blus zab mo*), a terma of Karma Lingpa.

13. Introduction to Pure Awareness: Natural Liberation through Naked Perception (*rig pa ngo sprod gcer mthong rang grol*), written by Padmasambhava.
 14. Natural Liberation of the Intermediate State of Rebirth: Oral Instructions Revealing the Embodiment of Virtue and Evil (*srid pa bar do'i dge sdig rang gzugs bstan pa'i gdams pa srid pa bar do rang grol*). No colophon.
 15. Supplement to Natural Liberation of the Intermediate State of Rebirth: Oral Teaching Revealing the Embodiment of Virtue and Evil (*srid pa bar do'i dge sdig rang gzugs bstan pa'i lhan thabs*). No colophon.
 16. Natural Liberation through Words of Confession in the Presence of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities (*zhi khro'i klong bshags brjod pa rang grol*), extracted by Padmasambhava from the Immaculate Confession tantra (*dri med bshags pa'i rgyud*), a terma of Padmasambhava.
 17. Natural Liberation of Hundreds of Shadows of Negative Actions, Accessory Text to the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States (*brgya phyag sdig srib rang grol zhes bya bar do thos grol gyi cha lag*), a terma of Karma Lingpa.
 18. The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States Whose Meaning Is Clear at First Sight: The Bijahara That Swiftly Liberates from Suffering—An Arrangement of the Recitation of the Introduction to the Intermediate State of Reality and Intermediate State of Rebirth, an Extract from *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities: The Profound Teaching on Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Primordial State* (*zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol cha lag las bar do thos grol chen mo'i chos nyid bar do dang srid pa'i bar do bcas pa'i ngo sprod gsal 'debs kyi 'don bsgriigs re gzigs mthong don gsal bar bar do'i du kha myur grol bi dza ha ra*). No colophon.
- II. A photo-offset edition of a manuscript version in *u-med* calligraphy of *zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol* (Delhi: Sherab Lama, [1975]–1976, reproduced on CD-ROM by the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (TBRC), New York,

W23454, vols. 1–3 [2330–2332]) from the library of the late Dudjom Rinpoche, who in the 1960s had his scribe prepare an elegant three-volume edition based on two volumes in his possession, apparently of Kathog monastery provenance. This manuscript contains sixty-four distinct texts sequentially categorized as history, empowerment, generation stage, accomplishing stage, introductions, path of skillful means, and guardian rites. For the texts contained in this edition, see Gyurme Dorje's *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

III. An Amdo edition, *The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States* (*bar do thos grol chen mo*), compiled by Khanpo Dorje. Published by zhang khang then ma dpe skrung khang, in mtsho sngon nang bstan dpe tshogs, vol. 1., Hong Kong, 2001. This edition comprises nineteen texts, namely:

1. Union with the Spiritual Teacher of the Three Enlightened Dimensions (*sku gsum bla ma'i rnal 'byor*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
2. Natural Liberation of Habitual Tendencies (*chos spyod bag chags rang grol*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
3. Elucidation of the Intermediate State of Reality: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States (*chos nyid bar do'i gsol 'debs thos grol chen mo zhe bya ba*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
4. Invocation That Calls to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help (*sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnams la ra mda' sbran pa'i smon lam*). No colophon.
5. Root Verses of the Intermediate States (*bar do'i rtsa tshig*). No colophon.
6. Introduction to the Intermediate State of Rebirth (*srid pa bar do ngo sprod*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
7. Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate State (*bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi smon lam*). No colophon.
8. Liberation through Wearing: Natural Liberation of the Aggregates (*btags grol phung po rang grol*). No colophon.

9. Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate State (*bar do'i smon lam 'jigs skyob ma*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
10. Liberation through Hearing: The Natural Liberation of Feeling, an Extract from the Great Compassionate One Who Dispels the Darkness of Ignorance (*thugs rje chen po ma rig mun sel las thos grol tshor ba rang grol*), terma of Nyima Tragpa.
11. Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Signs of Death (*'chi ltas mtshan ma rang grol*), terma of Karma Lingpa
12. Introduction to Pure Awareness: Natural Liberation through Naked Perception (*rig pa ngo sprod gcer mthong rang grol*), written by Padmasambhava.
13. Natural Liberation from the Intermediate State of Rebirth: Oral Instructions Revealing the Embodiment of Virtue and Evil (*dge sdig rang gzugs bstan pa'i gdams pa srid pa bar do rang grol*). No colophon.
14. Supplement to the Instructions Revealing the Embodiment of Virtue and Evil (*dge sdig rang gzugs bstan pa'i lhan thabs*), written by Namkha Chökyi Gyatso. No colophon.
15. Prayer to the Lineage Masters of the Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate States (*thos grol brgyud pa'i gsol 'debs*), composed by Nyima Tragpa.
16. Natural Liberation of Fear through the Rite of Deceiving Death (*'chi bslu 'jig pa rang grol*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
17. Natural Liberation through Words of Confession (*klong bshags brjod pa rang grol*), extracted by Padmasambhava from the Immaculate Confession tantra (*dri me shags rgyud*).
18. Liberation through Wearing: The Supreme Wish-fulfilling Jewel (*btags grol yid bzhin nor mchog*), terma of Rigdzin Gödem.
19. Natural Liberation of Hundreds of Shadows of Negative Actions (*brgya phyag sdig grib rang grol*). No

colophon.

IV. An edition contained in the collection of E. Gene Smith (TBRC serial number 0874) comprising seventeen texts, with some variation in the order and in the texts.

1. Union with the Spiritual Teacher: Natural Liberation of Habitual Mind-sets without Renouncing the Three Poisons (*sku gsum bla ma'i rnal 'byor gsol 'debs dug gsum bag chags rang grol*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
2. Elucidation of the Intermediate State of Reality: The Great Liberation through Hearing (*chos nyid bar do'i gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo*). No colophon.
3. The Manner of Arising of the Intermediate State of the Wrathful Deities (*khro bo'i bar do'i 'char tshul*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
4. Invocation That Calls to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help (*sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnams la ra mda' sbran pa'i smon lam*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
5. Root Verses of the Six Intermediate States (*bar do rnam pa drug gi rtsa tshig*). No colophon.
6. Invocation That Rescues from the Perilous Paths of the Intermediate States (*bar do 'phrang sgrol gyi smon lam*). No colophon.
7. Introduction to the Intermediate State of Rebirth (*srid pa bar do ngo sprod*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
8. Liberation through Wearing: Natural Liberation of the Aggregates (*btags grol phung po rang grol*). No colophon.
9. Invocation That Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States (*bar do'i smon lam 'jigs skyob ma*), written by Padmasambhava.
10. Natural Liberation of Habitual Tendencies (*chos spyod bag chags rang grol*). No colophon.
11. Natural Liberation of Hundreds of Shadows of Negative Actions (*brgya phyag sdig grib rang grol*). No colophon.
12. Natural Liberation through Words of Confession (*zhi khro klong bshags brjod pa rang grol*), extracted by

Padmasambhva from the Immaculate Confession tantra (*dri med bshags rgyud*).

13. Introduction to Pure Awareness: Natural Liberation through Naked Perception (*rig pa ngo sprod gcer mthong rang grol*), written by Padmasambhava.
14. Natural Liberation through Recognition of the Signs of Death (*'chi ltas mtshan ma rang grol*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
15. Natural Liberation of Fear through the Rite of Deceiving Death (*'chi bslu 'jig pa rang grol*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
16. Natural Liberation of the Intermediate State of Rebirth: Oral Instructions Revealing the Embodiment of Virtue and Evil (*dge sdig rang gzugs bstan pa'i gdams pa srid pa bar do rang grol*), terma of Karma Lingpa.
17. Supplement to the Instructions Revealing the Embodiment of Virtue and Evil (*dge sdig rang gzugs bstan pa'i lhan thabs*). No colophon.

TANTRAS

bshad rgyud (Explanatory tantra). Second of the *rgyud bzhi* (Four Medical Tantras). TBRC W30137, vol. 1.

dpal nam mkha' med pa'i sku gdung 'bar ba chen po'i rgyud (Great tantra of the glorious blazing nonspatial relics). In *rnying ma rgyud chu bdun* (Collected Nyingmapa tantras of the mind series). Reproduced from a set of prints from the Adzom blocks preserved in the Library of Dudjom Rinpoche by Sanje Dorje. Vol. III. New Delhi, 1973.

COMMENTARIES

Dorje Gyaltsen (*rdo rje rgyal mtshan*, 1137–1227). *gsang ba snying po'i 'grel pa nyi ma'i snying po smad cha* (Commentary to the essence of secrets: Heart of the sun, volume 2 [Guhyagarbha commentary]). In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa* (Nyingma kama collections). TBRC W25983, vol. 66 [3971].

Fifth Dalai Lama (*ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho*, 1617–1682). *zab pa dang rgya che ba'i dam pa'i chos kyi thob yig gang ga'i chu rgyun las glegs bam* (Scriptures from the flow of the Ganges River: An inventory of profound and vast sacred teachings [a record of teachings received]). Delhi: Neschung and Lankar, 1970. Also available at TBRC (W2CZ5990, vols. 1–4).

Garab Dorje (*dga' rab rdo rje*, dates unknown, possibly sixth century). *'jam dpal mtshan 'grel* (Commentary on the Mañjuśrīnāmasamgīti). Full title: *'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa'i don gsal bar byed pa slob dpon dga' rab rdo rjes mdzad pa* (Chanting the names of Mañjuśrī: Clarification of the meaning composed by Master Garab Dorje). In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*. TBRC W25983, vol. 60 [3965], fols. 39a5–6.

Gyarawa Namkha Chökyi Gyatso (*rgya ra ba nam mkha' chos kyi rgya mtsho*, 1430–?), ed. *brgyud pa'i lo rgyus mdor bsdus pa nor bu'i phreng ba* (A garland of jewels: A short history of the lineage). In *zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol gyi chos skor* (Collected revelations connected with the practice and propitiation of the wrathful and quiescent deities as revealed by the great Terchen Karma Lingpa). Delhi: Sherab Lama, [1975]–1976. TBRC W23454, vol. 1.

Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (*'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas*, 1813–1899), *shes bya mdzod* (Infinite ocean of knowledge), 3 vols. Beijing: Mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1982.

———. *dpal kye'i rdo rje'i rgyud kyi rgyal po brtags pa gnyis pa'i tshid don rnam par 'grol ba gzhom med rdo rje'i gsang ba 'byed pa* (Disclosing the secret of the invincible vajra: Phrase by phrase commentary to the Hevajra tantra, two examinations). Rumtek, India: Dharma Chakra Centre, 1981.

———. *rin chen gter mdzod*. Paro, Bhutan: Ngodrup and Sherab Drimay, 1976–1980.

———. *spyi don legs par bshad pa gsang ba bla na med pa rdo rje drva ba'i rgyan* (General meaning of the Hevajra tantra, topical commentary). Woodblock print. Palpung Monastery.

Jampel Dewai Nyima (*'jam dpal bde ba'i nyi ma*). *dpal gsang pa'i snying po de kho na nyid nges ba'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa zab don sgo brgya 'byed pa'i lde'u mig* (Commentary to the tantra to the

definitive reality, the essence of secrets: The key that opens a hundred of doors to the profound meaning). In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 79. TBRC W25983 [3984].

Lalitavajra (*sgeg pa'i rdo rje*, tenth century). *gsang ba'i snying po'i 'grel pa spar khab* (Commentary to the essence of secrets: Precious realm of light [Guhyagarbha tantra commentary]). In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 63. TBRC W25983 [3968].

Lochen Dharmashri, (*lo chen dharma shri*, 1654–1717). *sdom pa gsum rnam par nges pa'i gyi 'grel pa legs bshad ngo mtshar dpag bsam gyi snye ma* (The commentary that ascertains the three vows: The wish-fulfilling cluster of good explanations). Gangtok, India: Do Drup Chen Rinpoche Publications.

———. *gsang snying gi spyi don* (Meaning of the Guhyagarbha tantra). TBRC W25983, vol. 74 [3979].

Longchen Rabjampa (*klong chen rab 'byams pa*, 1308–1364). The Great Chariot commentary in the trilogy Finding Comfort and Ease in the Nature of Mind, vol. Kha, fols. 174a3–175b6.

———. *dpal gsang ba snying po de kho na nyid nges pa'i rgyud kyi 'grel pa phyogs bcu'i mun pa thams cad rnam par sel ba* (Commentary to the tantra to the definitive reality, the essence of secrets: Dispelling all obscurity in the ten directions). In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 68. TBRC W25983 [3973].

Rongzompa Chökyi Zangpo (*rong zom pa chos kyi bzang po*, 1012–1088). *sang snying gi 'grel pa* (Commentary to the Guhyagarbha tantra). In *bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*, vol. 67 [3972]. TBRC W25983.

Tsewang Rigdzin (*tshe dbang rig 'dzin*, born circa 1958). *lha rnams kyi zhal thang bri thabs* (The manner of painting deities in thangkas). Full title: *lhag pa'i lha rnams kyi zhal thang bri thabs kun bzang rnam par rol pa'i phyag rgya* (The manner of painting the superior deities in thangkas: The mudrā of the complete manifestation of Samantabhadra). Clement Town, India: The Eastern Sun Group, Ngagyur Nyingma College, 2005. TBRC W1KG4927.

Vasubandhu (*dbyig gnyen*, fifth century). *mngon par mdzod* (Sanskrit: *abhidharma-kośa*, Treasure of phenomenology).

Sources in English

EXISTING ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE TIBETAN BOOK OF THE DEAD (LISTED CHRONOLOGICALLY)

Evans-Wentz, Walter Yeeling, ed. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Or, The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering*. Oxford, UK, and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. First published in 1927.

Fremantle, Francesca, and Chögyam Trungpa, trans. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo by Guru Rinpoche according to Karma Lingpa*. Boston: Shambhala, 2003. First published in 1975.

Namkhai Norbu, Chögyal, ed. *Il Libro Tibetano dei Morti*. Rome: Newton Compton, 2007. First published in 1983.

Thurman, Robert, trans. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Liberation through Understanding in the Between*. New York: Bantam, 1994.

Gyurme Dorje, trans. Coleman, Graham, and Thupten Jinpa, eds. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First Complete Translation, 1st American Edition*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2007. First published in the United Kingdom in 2005.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES IN ENGLISH

Beer, Robert. *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.

Blezer, Henk. "A Preliminary Report on Investigations in the (*bon nyid*) 'od gsal and *zhi khro bardo*." In *Earlier zhang zhung snyang rgyud and snyan rgyud Literature*. Leiden, Netherlands: IIAS, 1999.

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu. *Chang-Chog of the Namchö Shitro: A Short Purification Ritual*. Arcidosso, Italy: Shang Shung Publications, 2008.

_____. Enrico Dell'Angelo, ed. Nancy Simmons, trans. *The Lamp that Enlightens Narrow Minds: The Life and Times of a Realized Tibetan Master, Khyentse Chökyi Wangchug*. Berkeley, CA: North

- Atlantic Books, 2012.
- Cuevas, Bryan J. *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- _____. “The Hidden Treasures of sGam-po-gdar Mountain: A History of the Zhi-Khro Revelations of Karma gling-pa and the Making of the Tibetan Book of the Dead.” PhD diss., University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 2000.
- Fremantle, Francesca. *Luminous Emptiness: Understanding the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2003.
- Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye. Kalu Rinpoche Translation Group, trans. *Myriad Worlds: Buddhist Cosmology in Abhidharma, Kalacakra, and Dzogchen. Book One of The Treasury of Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2003.
- _____. Elio Guarisco and Ingrid McLeod, trans. *Systems of Buddhist Tantra. Book Six, Part Four of The Treasury of Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2005.
- _____. Elio Guarisco and Ingrid McLeod, trans. *Elements of Tantric Practice. Book Eight, Part Three of The Treasury of Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008.
- Longchen Rabjampa. Herbert Guenther, trans. *Kindly Bent to Ease Us*. Three vols. Emeryville, CA: Dharma Publishing, 1975–1976.
- Namkhai Norbu, Chögyal. *Birth, Life and Death*. Arcidosso, Italy: Shang Shung Publications, 2008.
- Van Itallie, Jean Claude. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead for Reading Aloud*. Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1995.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Padmasambhava, the renowned eighth-century meditation master from Oddiyana who introduced the Vajrayana, the Tantric Buddhist vehicle, in Tibet, is considered the source of many termas, sacred texts that were hidden and rediscovered several centuries later by accomplished yogins called tertöns.

A fourteenth-century Tibetan mystic, **Karma Lingpa** is the tertön who, as a young man, discovered the ancient texts of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* that had been hidden hundreds of years before by Guru Padmasambhava.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, born in Eastern Tibet in 1938, is a widely recognized Dzogchen Great Perfection master in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. A scholar and prolific author, he was professor of Tibetan and Mongolian language and literature at L’Orientale of the University of Naples, Italy, for almost thirty years. He is the founder of three nonprofit organizations, including the International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies, dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan culture; A.S.I.A., a nongovernmental organization, committed to bolstering the health, education, and welfare of Tibetan and other disadvantaged peoples; and the International Dzogchen Community, an association of individuals interested in furthering their knowledge and practice of the Dzogchen teaching.

Elio Guarisco traveled to India at a young age to study Tibetan Buddhism after having completed a degree in the arts in his native Italy. He joined the Dzogchen Community in 1986 and is a main translator from the Tibetan in the Ka-ter Project of the International Shang Shung Institute for Tibetan Studies.

Nancy Simmons, a graduate of the University of Chicago and an American citizen, has lived in Italy for many years. She is a

founding member of the International Dzogchen Community established in 1976 by Chögyal Namkhai Norbu and is chief English editor and translator from the Italian in the Ka-ter Translation Project established by him.